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Voices of Resistance and Cultural Identity: A Thematic Analysis of Pakistani Rap Songs (2019-2021)

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Abstract

This study uses thematic analysis to explore the dominant themes in the most popular rap songs by Pakistani artists on YouTube from 2019 to 2021. Originating in the United States in the 1970s, rap music has become a global phenomenon, influencing diverse cultures, including Pakistan's. The literature review traces rap's roots in African American culture as a form of resistance and social commentary, and its integration into Pakistani music, which reflects sociopolitical instability and cultural fusion. The analysis identifies dominant themes in Pakistani rap, such as critiques of political corruption and social injustice, celebration of cultural identity and heritage, and portrayals of gender roles and misogyny. These themes underscore rap's role in addressing societal challenges, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting social critique and empowerment. Despite criticism from conservative segments, rap music in Pakistan continues to gain popularity, providing a platform for marginalized communities. The study concludes by highlighting rap's significance in shaping cultural and social discourse and suggests future research directions, including examining rap's impact on listeners' perceptions and conducting comparative studies with rap music from other countries.

Keywords: *Rap music, Pakistani music, cultural identity, social critique, marginalized communities, social injustice, cultural fusion.*

INTRODUCTION

Rap music, also known as hip-hop music, has evolved into a powerful medium for expressing social, political, and cultural issues across the globe. Originating in the United States during the 1970s, rap music quickly spread worldwide, influencing diverse cultures and communities. As a globally influential cultural phenomenon, rap has evolved into a dynamic and multifaceted genre of music and expression. Its themes range from social and political commentary to personal narratives, reflecting the experiences and aspirations of marginalized communities (McWilson, 2020; Chang, 2007). Emerging in the Bronx during the 1970s, rap holds deep historical and cultural significance, offering a creative outlet for African-American and

Latinx youth (Chang, 2007). This cultural grounding has shaped rap's identity and resilience over the decades. Moreover, rap artists have often used their music as a platform for activism, addressing critical issues like racism and police brutality. Language use, including the controversial use of the n-word, remains a subject of debate, with discussions on its appropriation and the perpetuation of stereotypes (McWilson, 2020). Gender dynamics within rap, particularly the portrayal of women, have been scrutinized, revealing both empowering and problematic aspects (Yende, 2022). The educational potential of rap has also been explored, demonstrating its ability to engage and empower youth through media literacy education (Emdin, 2016; Mahiri, 2017). As rap continues to evolve and commercialize, questions about authenticity and its social and political message persist (Gibson, 2014).

One of the defining features of rap is its role as a platform for social and political commentary. Rap artists have consistently used their lyrics and music to address pressing issues such as racism, police brutality, economic inequality, and political oppression (Beighey & Unnithan, 2006). Notable groups like Public Enemy and N.W.A. leveraged their music to challenge systemic injustices and advocate for social change. The genre's ability to confront and critique these issues has made it a powerful vehicle for activism, sparking important conversations and influencing social movements. Language has been a focal point of discussion within the rap community and among scholars. The use of explicit language, including the contentious use of the n-word, has generated significant debate (Autman, 2021). Some argue that reclaiming and redefining such language can be an act of empowerment and resistance, while others contend that it perpetuates derogatory stereotypes and undermines efforts to combat racism and discrimination. This linguistic controversy underscores the complexity of rap as a cultural force, where language serves both as a tool for empowerment and a source of division. The representation of women in rap has been a topic of extensive research and critique. While some female rap artists have risen to prominence and challenged gender norms within the genre, rap has often been criticized for its objectification and derogatory portrayal of women (Meyer, 2024). This tension within rap reflects broader discussions about gender equality and representation in media, prompting important dialogues about the industry's responsibility in promoting diverse and respectful portrayals of women.

The influence of rap extends far beyond its American origins, with the genre-transcending borders and cultures. Rap has become a global cultural force, influencing music, fashion, dance, and art worldwide (Polimante, 2020). Artists from diverse backgrounds have incorporated rap elements into their music, resulting in a fusion of styles and a rich diversity of thematic content. This global exchange has enriched rap's narrative and solidified its status as a universal language of youth and urban culture. The educational potential of rap has gained recognition in recent years. Rap-based education programs have been successful in engaging students and promoting critical thinking (Emdin, 2016). These programs leverage the cultural relevance of rap to teach a wide range of subjects, from history and literature to social justice and media literacy (Mahiri, 2017). The use of rap as an educational tool not only engages students but also empowers them to deconstruct media messages, fostering a deeper understanding of the world around them.

The commercial success of rap has led to questions about its authenticity and cultural roots. As rap has become a global industry, it has faced challenges related to maintaining its socio-political message while pursuing commercial viability (Akpan, 2016). Some argue that commercialization has diluted the genre's social and political impact, while others view it as a means of reaching broader audiences. This tension between artistry and commerce continues to shape the evolution of rap.

In Pakistan, rap music has grown significantly over the past few decades, providing a unique platform for artists to address societal challenges and cultural narratives through their lyrics. The Pakistani music industry boasts a vibrant rap music scene that has undergone significant evolution over the decades. Rap music in Pakistan has been influenced by a variety of genres, including traditional folk music, classical music, and Western pop. Artists like Nazia Hassan and Vital Signs played pivotal roles in popularizing pop music in Pakistan during the 1980s and 1990s (Qamar, Shaheen & Khan, 2021). However, the industry faced challenges due to political instability, censorship, and the rise of religious conservatism in the country. Rap's universal appeal lies not only in its infectious beats and rhythmic cadence but also in its capacity to serve as a platform for artists to express their lived experiences, social commentary, and cultural narratives. The importance of studying rap music within the context of Pakistan lies in its potential to reveal the tones of identity, social issues, and political discourse. Pakistan, a country with a rich tapestry of languages, cultures, and traditions, has seen the emergence of a vibrant rap scene in recent years. It is essential to recognize the significance of rap music as a global cultural force. Rap has transcended its origins to become a medium through which marginalized communities can voice their concerns, challenge societal norms, and engage with issues of identity and social justice. By examining the themes in Pakistani rap songs, the motive is to contribute to a broader understanding of how this genre reflects and influences societal values and issues in the Pakistani cultural context. Through an examination of the themes, lyrics, and narratives present in these songs, this study seeks to illuminate how rap music, despite originating in the United States, has evolved and adjusted to resonate with the distinct experiences and cultural identities of artists and audiences in Pakistan. This study aims to identify common themes presented in the most popular rap songs by Pakistani artists on YouTube from 2019 to 2021. By examining the lyrical content, this research seeks to understand how Pakistani rap reflects and engages with social, political, and cultural issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Global Cultural Phenomenon of Rap Music

Rap music, as a global cultural phenomenon, has consistently demonstrated its capacity to reflect the societal, cultural, and political narratives of the communities from which it originates. This study iterates prior studies that have delved into themes prevalent in rap songs, emphasizing the cultural and regional differences that influence lyrical content and narratives. It has been identified that rap serves as a platform for social commentary, identity exploration, and cultural expression. Rap music has been celebrated for its universality in addressing themes such as identity, struggle, and empowerment.

Historical and Socio-Political Roots of Rap Music

The origins of rap music are deeply rooted in African American culture, serving as a form of resistance and resilience against social injustices. Buozi and Creech (2018) have emphasized the genre's role in conveying stories of struggle and perseverance. Rap music provides a voice for marginalized communities, allowing artists to share their personal and collective experiences. Rabaka (2013) traced the origins of rap to early rhythm and blues, highlighting its evolution into a medium for social commentary and resistance. Scholars have recognized the genre's ability to resonate with audiences across cultures and contexts (Hyland, 2002). Rap's inherent rhythmic and

lyrical qualities have made it a versatile medium for artists to articulate their experiences, emotions, and social critiques, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers (Krimms, 2000).

Zhang (2020) conducted a comparative analysis of Chinese and American rap, highlighting the unique themes emerging in the Chinese rap scene, which often revolve around issues of cultural identity, globalization, and censorship. Rap's potential for political commentary and addressing social issues has been a focal point in the literature. Dennis (2016) examined the role of rap in critiquing racial discrimination and police brutality in the United States, showcasing how the genre can serve as a vehicle for activism and social change. Hodge (2020) explored how African-American rap artists navigate issues of language, race, and cultural authenticity, shedding light on the complex relationship between rap and identity. Turner (2010) discussed how African rap artists incorporate traditional elements into their music while engaging with global hip-hop culture, emphasizing the significance of local cultural context in shaping rap themes.

Rap Music in Pakistan: Emergence and Sociopolitical Context

While the existing literature has offered valuable insights into rap music's global reach, there is a dearth of analyses of rap themes in Pakistan. In the Pakistani context, rap music has emerged as a significant cultural phenomenon. The emergence of rap music in Pakistan has been relatively recent, but it has quickly gained traction among youth. The censorship and political repression during Zia-ul-Haq's regime (1978–1988) gave rise to a new wave of pro-democracy music, laying the foundation for the growth of rap and hip-hop in the country. Pirzadeh and Pirzada (2019) explained that mainstream music in Pakistan acts as a symbol of revolt and reflects the nation's sociopolitical instability.

The integration of rap music into Pakistani culture has seen the fusion of local languages and traditional music styles with Western rap influences. Artists like Fakhar-e-Alam and Abrar-ul-Haq pioneered this fusion in the 1990s, while contemporary rappers like Ali Gul Pir and Adil Omar continue to address social and political issues through their music (Mazhar, 2014). This blending of cultural elements exemplifies the concept of "transculturation," where global cultural forms are adapted and reinterpreted within local contexts. Studies such as Jan-Khan's (2014) examination of Pakistani rap have highlighted themes related to cultural pride, the clash of tradition and modernity, and activism against political corruption and censorship.

Challenges and Cultural Criticism of Rap in Pakistan

Despite its growing popularity, rap music in Pakistan faces criticism for its perceived promotion of violence and immorality. Conservative segments of society often view rap as a threat to cultural and religious values (Afzal-Khan, 2018). However, the genre's ability to resonate with the struggles of marginalized communities has made it a powerful tool for social critique and empowerment (Alam, 2021). While rap music is relatively new to Pakistan's music landscape, there are instances of collaboration and integration between rap and pop artists. Collaborative projects between Pakistani rap and pop artists have emerged, showcasing a fusion of styles and thematic content (Pirzadeh and Pirzada, 2019). These collaborations not only enrich the musical diversity of Pakistan but also contribute to cultural exchange and dialogue within the global music industry.

Afzal-Khan in 2018, while mentioning the existence of rap from the perspective of Pakistan in her blog, indicates the importance of rap music in Pakistan. Rap has evolved as a mirror reflection for the depiction of cultural conventions as well as a variety of issues. Saeed

(2021) states that a younger generation of rappers has emerged in Pakistan who are raising important themes that are barely discussed in rap music. The street rappers are part of a new generation of performers establishing Pakistan's own indigenous rap culture. Languages from the region, street banter, and slang are all crucial components of gully rap identification.

Linguistic and Cultural Transcendence in Pakistani Hip-Hop

Hip-hop is a relatively new form of music in Pakistan. It has been produced in many different languages and styles since the 1990s, initially drawing influence from unofficial English communities and then, in the early 2000s, provincial Punjabi rap. Trendy new hip-hop movements in Sindhi and Pashto emerged in the late 2000s due to inspiration from Punjabi rap and a combo of different dialects of Pakistan. When Urdu rap musicians first tried to make an impact, they largely fizzled out. For reasons of both social status and ethnic politics, British dominance switched from Persian to Urdu as the dominant language in the middle of the nineteenth century. Despite the genre's meteoric rise in popularity in recent years, many of Pakistan's more seasoned music fans continue to prefer more mainstream styles like pop or classical. Yet, with the cultural relevance and embedded socio-economic situation, rap emerged with these starter ideologies. With the mix-up of the language and same themes, Pennycook's work on global hip hop and its connection with different cultures from 2003 to 2007 relates the idea with the term "transculturation." In a globalization era, both cultural and linguistic expressions circulate, are appropriated, and are refashioned at the grassroots; this process is known as transculturation. Considering all the previous literature, the primary research question guiding this study is: "What are the dominant themes in the most popular rap songs by Pakistani artists on YouTube from 2019 to 2021?"

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The rationale for conducting this research study stems from the need to explore and understand the unique adaptation and evolution of rap music within the Pakistani cultural and socio-political landscape. Rap, as a global phenomenon, has been a powerful medium for expressing social, political, and cultural issues. However, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding how this genre is localized in non-Western contexts, particularly in Pakistan. Given rap's origins in African American communities as a form of resistance and social commentary, it is crucial to investigate how Pakistani rap artists have adopted and adapted this genre to reflect their societal issues and cultural narratives. The Pakistani rap scene provides a rich site for examining themes such as political corruption, social injustice, cultural identity, and gender roles, which are pertinent to understanding the broader dynamics of Pakistani society (Ajmal, Rehan & Kanwal, 2024).

Moreover, this study aims to shed light on how rap music in Pakistan serves as a voice for the youth and marginalized communities, offering them a platform for expression and potential social change. By analyzing the thematic content of popular rap songs, this research seeks to highlight the educational potential of rap in engaging young audiences and fostering critical thinking and media literacy. The rationale also includes the intention to contribute to the global discourse on hip-hop culture by providing a comparative perspective that enriches the understanding of rap's influence and significance across different cultures. This study not only fills a significant gap in the existing body of research but also paves the way for future studies on the impact of rap music in various cultural and socio-political contexts. Overall, the research is

driven by the need to document, analyze, and understand the multifaceted role of rap music in contemporary Pakistani society.

METHODOLOGY

In terms of the research paradigm, this study aligns with a constructivist-interpretivist approach. This paradigm emphasizes the subjective nature of reality, positing that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and cultural experiences. Given that rap music is inherently a reflection of the socio-cultural and political realities of the communities it represents, the constructivist-interpretivism paradigm allows for a nuanced interpretation of how Pakistani rappers convey their experiences, struggles, and identities through their lyrics. The study's qualitative nature and focus on thematic analysis fit well within this paradigm, as it seeks to explore how meaning is constructed through the lyrical narratives and cultural contexts of rap music. By analyzing recurring themes in the lyrics, the research acknowledges the multiple realities that exist within the cultural framework of Pakistani society, highlighting the role of rap as a medium for expressing personal and collective experiences. This paradigm also supports the interpretive depth required to understand the global adaptation of rap music in a local context, emphasizing the importance of cultural, political, and social influences on artistic expression. This study employs a qualitative approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967) to investigate the themes present in the most popular rap songs by Pakistani singers on YouTube from 2019 to 2021. The research focuses on identifying, analyzing, and interpreting recurring themes in the lyrics of rap songs. The methodology outlined provides a structured approach to understanding the themes in Pakistani rap music within a cultural context. By employing a rigorous thematic analysis framework, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on rap music's socio-cultural impact and its global variations. Initially, we immersed ourselves in the data by thoroughly reviewing and familiarizing ourselves with the rap lyrics from Pakistan. We systematically generated initial codes, identifying key concepts, ideas, and patterns within the lyrics relevant to our research objectives. These codes were then organized into potential themes by sorting and grouping similar codes. Through iterative review and refinement, we critically examined and revised the themes to ensure their coherence and alignment with the data.

Once the themes were established, we provided clear definitions and descriptive names for each theme, capturing its essence and significance within the context of the rap lyrics. Finally, we mapped out the relationships between the themes and interpreted their implications for understanding rap music in Pakistan. By following the approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967), we conducted a rigorous and systematic thematic analysis, uncovering meaningful insights into the thematic content of the rap lyrics and their cultural significance.

For this study, a total of 10 popular Pakistani rap songs from the period 2019 to 2021 were carefully selected to serve as the sample (see Table 1). These selections were made based on their popularity and cultural significance within the local rap scene.

Table 1
Selected Pakistani Rap Songs (2019-2021)

Song Title	Artists Names	Year of Release
Bhaari Hain	Talhah Yunus, Lil Muslim, Mr. Mani, Soul Kid, JJ47, and Talha Anjum	2019
Desi Dab	Young Desi	2019
Same Beef	Bohemia and Sidhu Moose Wala	2019

Gumaan	Young Stunners (Talhah Yunus and Talha Anjum)	2020
Tayyar Hain	Ali Azmat, Haroon, Asim Azhar and Arif Lohar	2020
Don't Mind	Young Stunners (Talhah Yunus and Talha Anjum) and Rap Demon	2020
Conflict Management	Rap Engineers	2020
Purpose Rap	Young Stunners (Talhah Yunus and Talha Anjum)	2020
Introduction	Faris Shafi	2021
Afsanay	Young Stunners (Talhah Yunus and Talha Anjum)	2021

Data Collection

The sample includes the top 10 most-viewed rap songs of Pakistani singers on YouTube from 2019 to 2021. The lyrics of the selected songs were transcribed by carefully listening to them to ensure accuracy.

Analytical Framework

Thematic analysis was used to identify and analyze patterns (themes) within the lyrics. An inductive approach was employed, where themes emerge naturally from the data rather than being imposed by pre-existing theories or frameworks. Open coding is conducted initially to identify significant words, phrases, or sentences in the lyrics. Axial coding follows, where initial codes are organized into broader themes and sub-themes. Selective coding is the final stage, refining and integrating themes into coherent categories.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 12, was used to manage, code, and analyze the textual data systematically. In addition to software-assisted analysis, manual review ensured nuanced interpretation of lyrics, particularly for cultural references and linguistic nuances unique to Pakistan.

Themes Development

By systematically organizing the data through initial coding, axial coding, and selective coding, we uncovered the underlying themes and patterns in Pakistani rap lyrics, providing a deeper understanding of the cultural and personal narratives within the music.

Table 2

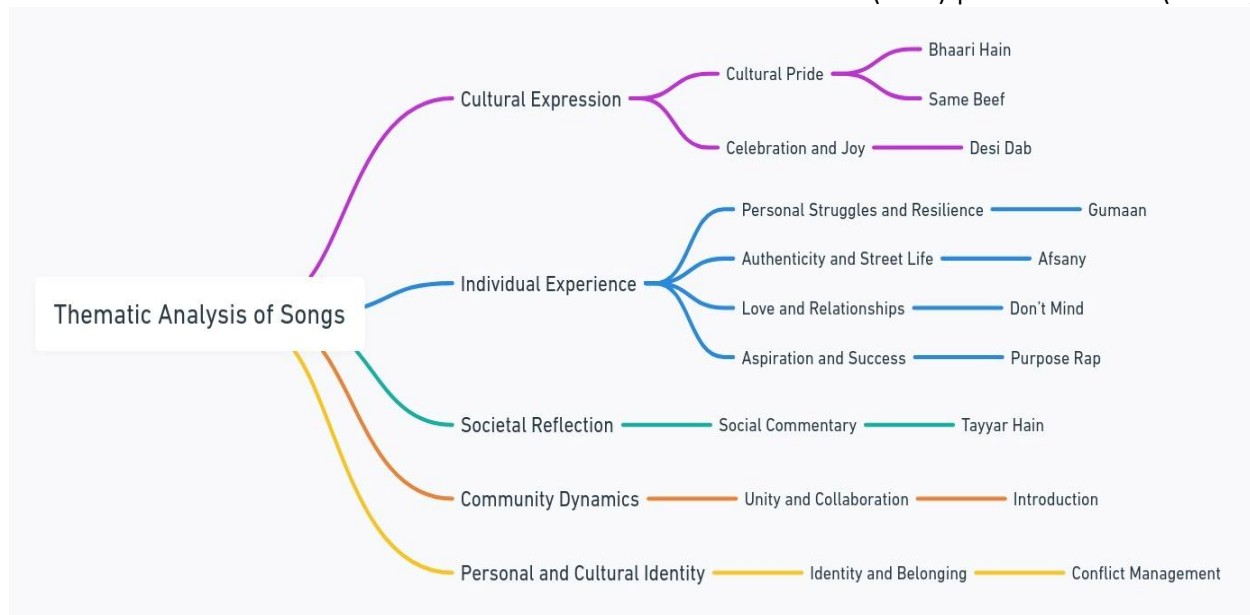
Thematic Analysis Coding

Song Title	Artists Names	Initial Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Bhaari Hain	Talhah Yunus, Lil Muslim, Mr. Mani, Soul Kid, JJ47, and Talha Anjum	Cultural heritage, traditions, pride, national identity	Cultural Pride	Cultural Expression
Desi Dab	Young Desi	Celebration, dance, energy, fun	Celebration and Joy	
Same Beef	Bohemia and Sidhu Moose Wala	Cultural representation, rap culture, pride	Cultural Pride	

Song Title	Artists Names	Initial Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Gumaan	Young Stunners (Talhah Yunus and Talha Anjum)	Struggle, hardship, resilience, personal growth	Personal Struggles and Resilience	Individual Experience
Afsany	Young Stunners (Talhah Yunus and Talha Anjum)	Personal experiences, street life, challenges, authenticity	Authenticity and Street Life	
Purpose Rap	Young Stunners (Talhah Yunus and Talha Anjum)	Ambitions, success, dreams, perseverance, women empowerment, gender equality and female emancipation	Aspiration and Success, Gender Roles	
Tayyar Hain	Ali Azmat, Haroon, Asim Azhar and Arif Lohar	Unity, national issues, collective action, patriotism	Social Commentary	Societal Reflection
Introduction	Faris Shafi	Collaboration, unity, rap community, international influence	Unity and Collaboration	Community Dynamics
Conflict Management	Rap Engineers	Identity, belonging, self-reflection, cultural roots	Identity and Belonging	Personal and Cultural Identity
Don't Mind	Young Stunners (Talhah Yunus and Talha Anjum) and Rap Demon	Love, relationships, emotions, heartbreak	Love and Relationships	Emotional Connection

The thematic mind map for Pakistani rap songs can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Thematic Mind Map



INTERPRETATION OF THEMES

1. Cultural Expression

Cultural expression in Pakistani rap music is a powerful theme that highlights the artists' pride and joy in their cultural heritage and traditions. This theme is evident in the lyrics, music styles, and visual representations in rap videos. By embracing their roots, Pakistani rappers connect with their audience on a deeper level, fostering a sense of identity and belonging. Songs like "Bhaari Hain" by Talhah Yunus, Lil Muslim, Mr. Mani, Soul Kid, JJ47 and Talha Anjum along with "Desi Dab" by Young Desi and "Same Beef" by Bohemia and Sidhu Moose Wala serve as prime examples, emphasizing cultural pride by celebrating the unique aspects of Pakistani heritage. "Bhaari Hain" for instance, reflects on the rich history and traditions of the region, while "Desi Dab" showcases the fusion of traditional and modern elements, symbolizing the evolution of Pakistani culture in the contemporary world. These songs are not just about personal or social narratives; they honor and highlight the distinctiveness of Pakistani culture. Pakistani rappers often use their music to represent their roots and tell stories deeply intertwined with their cultural background. This representation goes beyond mere acknowledgment; it involves a deliberate and artistic portrayal of cultural symbols, languages, and traditions. Through their music, these artists articulate the values, struggles, and triumphs of their communities, giving voice to experiences that are uniquely Pakistani. In addition to cultural pride and representation, tracks like "Desi Dab" by Young Desi emphasize celebration and fun, showcasing the vibrant aspects of Pakistani culture and offering a joyous portrayal of cultural life at international platform.

2. Individual Experience

The theme of individual experience in Pakistani rap music focuses on personal narratives of struggle, growth, and ambition. This theme allows artists to share their journeys, offering listeners a glimpse into their lives and the challenges they have faced. Songs like "Gumaan" and "Purpose Rap" by Young Stunners (Talhah Yunus and Talha Anjum) are exemplary in this regard. "Gumaan" delves into the artist's perseverance and resilience in the face of adversity, narrating

how he overcomes obstacles to achieve his goals. Similarly, "Purpose Rap" reflects on the artist's past struggles and future aspirations, highlighting a journey of personal growth and determination to succeed. This song also depicts women empowerment, gender equality, and female emancipation. In addition to these narratives of struggle and ambition, songs like "Afsany" by Young Stunners emphasize authenticity and street life experiences. This track portrays the raw and unfiltered realities of life, presenting a genuine depiction of the artist's environment and the challenges therein. By sharing these personal stories, Pakistani rappers not only express their individuality but also resonate with listeners who may have faced similar experiences. This connection fosters a sense of solidarity and understanding between the artists and their audience, as they collectively navigate the complexities of life, aspirations, and identity. The theme of individual experience thus becomes a powerful tool for storytelling, allowing artists to articulate their journeys and inspire others through their music.

3. Societal Reflection

The theme of societal reflection in Pakistani rap music addresses broader societal issues and promotes collective action and unity. This theme allows artists to engage with and comment on the social, political, and economic challenges facing their communities and the nation at large. Songs like "Tayyar Hain" by Ali Azmat, Haroon, Asim Azhar and Arif Lohar exemplify this theme by reflecting on national issues and urging listeners to embrace unity and patriotism. "Tayyar Hain" calls for collective action and solidarity, emphasizing the importance of coming together to address common challenges and work towards a better future for Pakistan.

By tackling these broader societal themes, Pakistani rappers can use their music as a platform for social commentary and advocacy. They bring attention to critical issues such as inequality, corruption, and national identity, encouraging their audience to think critically about these topics and consider their role in creating positive change. This theme of societal reflection not only highlights the artists' awareness of their social environment but also demonstrates their commitment to using their art for the greater good. Through their powerful lyrics and engaging narratives, these artists inspire a sense of collective responsibility and motivate listeners to act. Whether it's by fostering a sense of national pride, promoting social justice, or encouraging civic engagement, the theme of societal reflection in Pakistani rap music plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse and influencing societal values. It underscores the genre's potential to transcend entertainment and become a catalyst for social transformation and unity.

4. Community Dynamics

The theme of community dynamics in rap music highlights the collaborative spirit and unity within the rap community. This is vividly illustrated in "Introduction" by Faris Shafi showing both collaboration and international influences. The track brings together both artists, blending their unique styles and perspectives, which underscores the importance of teamwork and solidarity. This collaboration amplifies the collective strength of the rap community, allowing for a more powerful and unified voice.

International influences further emphasize the global nature of rap, illustrating how the genre transcends cultural and geographical boundaries. This fusion enriches the music, making it diverse and inclusive, while reflecting the genre's adaptability. Through these collaborative efforts, the rap community showcases its resilience and strength, demonstrating that unity and cooperation can lead to greater creative achievements. This theme underscores the positive

aspects of working together and reinforces the idea that the rap community can stand united in its pursuit of artistic expression and social commentary.

5. *Personal and Cultural Identity*

The theme of personal and cultural identity in rap music delves into the exploration of one's sense of self and place within the cultural landscape. This is exemplified in the song "Conflict Management" by Rap Engineers, which focuses on self-reflection and the significance of cultural roots. The track delves into the journey of understanding and embracing one's identity, emphasizing how personal experiences and cultural heritage shape who we are.

The lyrics of "Conflict Management" encourage listeners to reflect on their backgrounds and the importance of staying connected to their cultural origins. It highlights the struggle to maintain a sense of belonging while navigating the complexities of modern life. This theme underscores the value of acknowledging and celebrating one's heritage, fostering a deeper connection to community and self. By exploring these concepts, the song resonates with listeners on a personal level, emphasizing that understanding and embracing one's identity is crucial for personal growth and fulfillment.

6. *Emotional Connection*

The theme of emotional connection in rap music addresses the profound emotional experiences related to love and relationships. This is exemplified in the song "Don't Mind" by Young Stunners (Talhah Yunus, Talha Anjum) and Rap Demon, which portrays emotional narratives that resonate deeply with listeners. The track delves into the complexities of human emotions, capturing the pain, longing, and vulnerability that come with love and relationships. Through heartfelt lyrics and evocative storytelling, "Don't Mind" creates a powerful emotional bond with its audience, allowing listeners to connect with the artist's experiences and feelings. The song's raw and honest portrayal of emotions helps to foster a sense of empathy and understanding, making it relatable to anyone who has experienced similar sentiments. This theme highlights the power of music to convey deep emotional truths and to create a shared emotional experience, reinforcing the idea that rap can be a powerful medium for expressing and connecting universal human emotions.

DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of the most popular rap songs by Pakistani singers on YouTube from 2019 to 2021 reveals a multifaceted portrayal of themes that resonate deeply with the country's social, political, and cultural landscape. The analysis demonstrates how Pakistani rap music serves as a powerful medium for cultural expression, individual storytelling, societal reflection, community dynamics, personal and cultural identity, and emotional connection.

Cultural expression emerges as a prominent theme, with artists celebrating their cultural heritage and traditions through their music. This is evident in the lyrics, music styles, and visual representations in rap videos. Songs like "Bhaari Hain" and "Desi Dab" by Young Desi and "Same Beef" by Bohemia and Sidhu Moose Wala serve as prime exemplify this theme by incorporating local languages, dialects, and traditional music styles. These tracks highlight the artists' pride in their roots and foster a sense of identity and belonging among listeners. By embracing their cultural heritage, Pakistani rappers not only preserve their traditions but also offer a counter-

narrative to dominant Western influences, showcasing the richness and diversity of Pakistani culture (Naveed, 2015).

Individual experience is another significant theme, focusing on personal narratives of struggle, growth, and ambition. Songs like "Gumaan" and "Purpose Rap" by Young Stunners (Talhah Yunus and Talha Anjum) provide a glimpse into the artists' lives, highlighting their perseverance and resilience in the face of adversity. These tracks resonate with listeners who have faced similar challenges, fostering a sense of solidarity and understanding. The portrayal of authentic street life experiences, as seen in "Afsany" by Young Stunners, further emphasizes the raw and unfiltered realities of the artists' environments. This theme underscores the power of storytelling in rap music, allowing artists to articulate their journeys and inspire others through their narratives (Keyes, 2004).

Societal reflection in Pakistani rap music addresses broader societal issues, promoting collective action and unity. Songs like "Tayyar Hain" by Ali Azmat, Haroon, Asim Azhar and Arif Lohar reflect on national issues and urge listeners to embrace unity and patriotism. By tackling themes such as inequality, corruption, and national identity, Pakistani rappers use their music as a platform for social commentary and advocacy. This theme highlights the artists' awareness of their social environment and their commitment to using their art for the greater good. Through their powerful lyrics and engaging narratives, these artists inspire a sense of collective responsibility and motivate listeners to act, making rap a catalyst for social transformation and unity (Camacho 2016).

Community dynamics highlights the collaborative spirit and unity within the rap community. This theme is vividly illustrated in "Introduction" by Faris Shafi showcasing both collaboration and international influences. The track brings together both artists, blending their unique styles and perspectives, which underscores the importance of teamwork and solidarity. This collaboration amplifies the collective strength of the rap community, allowing for a more powerful and unified voice. By embracing international influences, the genre transcends cultural and geographical boundaries, enriching the music and reflecting the genre's adaptability (Lachman, 2014).

Personal and cultural identity delves into the exploration of one's sense of self and place within the cultural landscape. "Conflict Management" by Rap Engineers exemplifies this theme by focusing on self-reflection and the significance of cultural roots. The song encourages listeners to reflect on their backgrounds and the importance of staying connected to their cultural origins. This theme underscores the value of acknowledging and celebrating one's heritage, fostering a deeper connection to community and self. By exploring these concepts, the song resonates with listeners on a personal level, emphasizing that understanding and embracing one's identity is crucial for personal growth and fulfillment (Austin, 2008).

Emotional connection addresses the profound emotional experiences related to love and relationships. "Don't Mind" by Young Stunners (Talhah Yunus, Talha Anjum) and Rap Demon portrays emotional narratives that resonate deeply with listeners, capturing the pain, longing, and vulnerability that come with love and relationships. Through heartfelt lyrics and evocative storytelling, the song creates a powerful emotional bond with its audience, allowing listeners to connect with the artist's experiences and feelings. This theme highlights the power of music to convey deep emotional truths and to create a shared emotional experience, reinforcing the idea that rap can be a powerful medium for expressing and connecting over universal human emotions (Oware, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of how rap music, originally rooted in African American culture, has been adapted and integrated into the Pakistani cultural context. It highlights rap's role as a powerful platform for social critique, cultural expression, and empowerment, particularly for marginalized communities. Through themes such as political corruption, social injustice, cultural identity, gender roles and gender inclusivity. Pakistani rap from 2019 to 2021 has emerged as a vital medium for societal reflection and change. By blending local languages, traditional music, and personal narratives, Pakistani rappers have created a distinct identity within the global hip-hop genre, addressing both universal and local challenges.

The research underscores rap's capacity to engage listeners on a personal and emotional level, fostering unity and promoting critical discourse on issues of identity, belonging, and social transformation. It also explores rap's educational potential, showcasing how it can empower youth through media literacy and critical thinking. As a cultural force, Pakistani rap continues to evolve, reflecting the aspirations of a new generation and influencing public consciousness. This study not only fills a gap in the literature by exploring the Pakistani rap scene but also sets the stage for future research, contributing to the preservation and appreciation of contemporary cultural expressions in Pakistan. Rap music in Pakistan is thus positioned as an enduring voice in the nation's cultural and political landscape, promoting both social critique and cultural identity.

Based on this thematic analysis, several recommendations emerge for future research and exploration in this field. Firstly, further studies should delve into the impact of rap music on listeners' perceptions and attitudes towards the social and cultural issues addressed in the songs. Understanding how these narratives influence audience attitudes can provide deeper insights into the genre's role in shaping public discourse. Additionally, comparative research between Pakistani rap and rap music from other regions could offer valuable perspectives on the global dynamics of the genre, highlighting both universal and unique aspects of cultural expression. Researchers should also consider exploring the role of rap music in empowering marginalized communities and fostering a sense of solidarity and activism. Lastly, investigations into the evolving nature of rap music in response to socio-political changes in Pakistan can help track how the genre adapts and responds to shifting cultural landscapes. These recommendations aim to expand the understanding of rap music's socio-cultural impact and its potential as a tool for social transformation.

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