

Effects of Turkish cultural products on its foreign policy toward Africa: Turkish TV series as an example of soft power in Kenya, Mozambique, and Senegal

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Abstract

Along with other international players such as China, India, or Russia, Turkey decided to increase its economic engagement with Africa starting more than a decade ago, around the time when the current ruling *Justice and Development Party (AK Party)* came to power. At the same time, it has been enhancing its soft power by building infrastructure, increasing its military presence, becoming visible in humanitarian aid, and exporting cultural products. This country's penetration and involvement in local African life have been controversial in terms of international politics, and its media products could be one of the essential strategies to change the dominant Western narratives. This research is based on the assertion that, through Turkish TV series, Turkish soft power creates a perception of Turkey in African countries and argues that those that have been aired on that continent have a political effect on people. To achieve the objectives proposed in this study, an in-depth interview method was used to collect data, taking into consideration information, cultural characteristics, and experiences within an ethnographic approach. In this context, we interviewed people who live in Mozambique, Kenya, and Senegal, where relations with Turkey have especially strengthened in the last 10 years, and who regularly watch Turkish TV series. This study asserts that Turkish TV series play an important role in the way Turkey is perceived in the African countries in which they are consumed but also serve, in a positive way, as a key information source regarding the country's image.

Keywords

Turkish series; Cultural industries; Video on demand; VoD; Media geopolitics; Soft power; Colonialism; Cultural diplomacy; Cultural hegemony; Cultural diversity; Tourism.

1. Introduction

Power is the most salient element of international relations, and states are the main actors, owners, and implementers of it. This concept has been one of the most discussed topics in political science from the past to the present day (**Cutler et al.**, 1999; **Frieden**, 1999; **Waltz**, 2010). Power, which became more important with the advent of the nation-state, has received more attention than other concepts in international relations. With changes and developments in technology and media, different philosophers defined the concept of power differently in each period.



There is a silent war underway for the control of narratives in the global digital ecosystem—a war in which the major technological platforms are using the capitalist logic of accumulating and standardizing content, achieving cultural hegemony, in the words of **Gramsci** (2013) and **Mattelart** (2021). Multinationals such as *Google*, *Apple*, *Facebook*, *Amazon*, and *Microsoft*, known under the acronym GAFAM, can influence users by applying data mining and algorithmic rules (**Zuboff**, 2020).

The geopolitical fringes of the world system seem to have been sidelined according to the conclusions of the report commissioned by *Unesco*, which in the 1980s determined that 80% of the information consumed in the so-called Global South was monopolized by Western countries (**McBride**, 1980). However, the possibilities that opened up with the massive flow of online content and the proliferation of cultural products such as television series and soap operas produced outside of Western paradigms and consumed worldwide would lead to the idea of the “struggle for meaning” that **Hall** (2013, p. 249) talked about. This situation reveals new lines of study in which international relations and the use of cultural diplomacy or soft power together with the analysis of cultural and communication industries provide interesting nuances for the analysis of the geopolitics of media around the world.

Turkey has increased its economic engagement with Africa over the past decade (**Donelli**, 2021). At the same time, it has been enhancing its soft power through the construction of facilities, its military presence, humanitarian aid, and cultural products such as TV series. This country’s penetration and involvement in local African life have been controversial in terms of international politics, and its media products could be one of the strategies essential in changing this narrative.

The global impact enjoyed by Turkish TV productions overlapped with Ahmet Davutoglu’s appointment as Foreign Minister in 2009 and his new geographical vision. From then on, Turkey has transformed its international presence—which until then had consisted of maintaining a passive role, concentrating its interests exclusively in the United States and Europe—so as to become a key player in the region and disseminate what has been called a pan-Islamist current or a neo-Ottomanism (**Albentosa-Vidal**, 2017).

According to this narrative promoted by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan over the past decade, films and TV series produced in Turkey would support the idea of building a new country. These series often show the unity and solidarity of the Ottoman period, as well as Muslim Turkey, but examples are also presented that would highlight values such as heroism, bravery, sacrifice for the nation, or the mythological component of the Muslim religion. This Turkish aspiration to become a political and cultural role model for the Arab Muslim world has been strengthened with the export of Turkish series to the African continent, and translates into obvious economic returns, but above all

“it would help to spread the image of a liberal and democratic Turkey to the world” (**Tutal-Cheviron; Çam**, 2017, p. 7).

The Turkish TV series industry has reached an income level of \$350 million and exports to more than 140 countries (*Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism*, 2017). Although it is difficult to obtain precise information on which TV series are watched in which countries or the number of consumers of these products, **Karlıdağ** and **Bulut** (2014, p. 76) interpret this success as follows:

“Short-term return on investment, new communication technologies, Istanbul’s inviting atmosphere, sociocultural variables, and their relationship with television series can be evaluated in the context of politics and strategy”.

TV series would fall under the umbrella of popular culture (**Nye**, 2004), a concept that varies according to context (**Ryan; Kellner**, 1988), for example, that of the implementation of cultural diplomacy (**Schneider**, 2006), media technologies (**Warren**, 2014), media framing practices themselves (**Chong; Druckman**, 2007), or the influence of Internet networks (**Zaharna**, 2007). A good example of the application of **Nye’s** argument, which states that soft power is used to achieve an objective through attraction rather than pressure and money, is the role that the Chinese media play on the African continent (**Zhang; Wasserman; Mano**, 2016; **Madrid-Morales**, 2021; **Ruiz-Cabrera**, 2022).

Turkey has taken second place after the United States in terms of number of television series productions in the world. Turkey would be exporting its own popular culture through these cultural products (Özarslan, 2020). This makes it easier to influence individuals without pressuring them, primarily through products of popular culture. Moreover, the prominence of these Turkish commodities in the world has ever more frequently made them the subject of academic literature (**Kraidy; Al-Ghazzi**, 2013; **Yiğit**, 2013; **Yörük; Vatikiotis**, 2013; **Karlıdağ; Bulut**, 2014; **Balaban**, 2015; **Yesil**, 2015).

As we will show below, Turkey plays a key role on the African continent and is a new player with little presence in academic papers. This study asserts that soft power creates a positive perception through Turkish TV series and argues that they have a political impact on people in the countries where they are broadcast and/or viewed. In addition, this study offers a new approach to the forms of Turkish soft power in Africa through a media perspective.

Kenya, Senegal, and Mozambique have been included in the research as case studies because (i) they have different colonial pasts and linguistic links to their former colonizers; (ii) they function as important regional economic centers in East Africa, West Africa, and Southern Africa; and (iii) they offer a new look at the consumption and dynamics of these Turkish products in Africa. The pur-

“The global impact enjoyed by Turkish TV productions overlapped with Ahmet Davutoglu’s appointment as Foreign Minister in 2009”

pose of this research is therefore to study Turkish TV series released after 2010 in particular in these three countries and what the audiences' perception of Turkey is based on these products.

Thus, the study examines the role of Turkish television series on the African continent:

- (i) as a source of information about Turkey
- (ii) as creative products of the cultural industry within the framework of international public relations for Turkey
- (iii) with the aim of exploring Turkey's constructive role in its soft power

2. Literature review and theoretical background

2.1. Turkey's soft power in Africa

Soft power can be defined as the ability to influence the behavior of others and obtain the desired results. As **Nye**, father of the concept of soft power, comments:

"The countries that are likely to be more attractive and gain soft power in the information age are those with multiple channels of communication that help to frame issues" (2004, pp. 31-32).

Li (2009) further specifies that soft power refers to culture, values, development models, or presence in international institutions that would place it on the global stage.

In the context of Turkish media presence on the African continent, two narratives could be mentioned: a win-win narrative in which all countries involved would benefit and a public diplomacy narrative (**Börekci; Löffler**, 2021, p. 92). In the first of these narratives, there is an overt interpretation in which Turkey intends to differentiate itself from the role played by the former colonial powers. The country boasts of not having a colonial past in Africa and of being a country in the Southern Hemisphere that is part of an imaginary hub from which it could offer alternatives to the Western *modus operandi*. Regarding the latter narrative, in terms of soft power, Turkey appears to be a new player that has been able to position itself in areas in which, for example, China, the major player on the continent, has not been able to achieve legitimacy thus far, such as the military, humanitarian aid, or religion.

With respect to Turkish-African relations, there are three historical stages of note. The first key moment was the 1960s, at a time when many African countries gained independence and Turkey adopted a pro-Western attitude when it came to the process of decolonization. In fact, relations with the countries of the continent often took a back seat (**Tepeciklioğlu** 2012). According to **Ataöv** (1976), while Angola's independence from its colonial power, Portugal, was being voted upon in the *United Nations General Assembly*, the Turkish authorities were instructed to reach a consensus on the vote together with the *NATO* allies who disagreed, and the very independence of Tunisia and Algeria was considered a domestic policy issue for France. Despite this background, the African countries that gained their independence were recognized by Turkey, and diplomatic relations were established (**Hazar**, 2003).

The second stage began in 1998 with the drafting and implementation of the *Africa Action Plan*. The continent began to play a more prominent role in Turkish foreign policy, and measures were included to improve relations with African countries in areas as varied as education, culture, economics, and even the military. The *Justice and Development Party (AK Party)*, which came to power in the 2002

elections, began to pay particular attention to Africa. The countries on this continent are important markets for Turkey; however, Erdoğan also needed to achieve his short-term goals, such as becoming a temporary member of the *UN Security Council*, which he did in 2009, and for that, he needed the support of the African bloc. The *Africa Action Plan* was followed by the *Strategy for the Development of Commercial and Economic Relations with African Countries*, implemented in 2003.

“ Broadcasts of Latin American soap operas had a monopoly in Africa from the 1970s to the 2000s. Since then, other similar products have been created in India, the Philippines, and Turkey ”

The third stage coincided with the 2005 declaration of the "Year of Africa," which was coupled with Turkey's status as an observer country in the *African Union*. Thereafter, one of the most important milestones in Turkey-Africa relations was the *First Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit*, held in Istanbul in 2008, in which approximately 50 African countries and representatives of 11 international and regional organizations participated. In the same year, there was an increase in the number of representative offices in African countries. In 2009, there were seven Turkish embassies on the continent, and this number increased to 19 in 2013 in accordance with the *Council of Ministers'* decisions regarding the addition of new embassies and consulates general to Africa. As of January 2023, Turkey had representation in 39 countries, and the national carrier *Turkish Airlines* flew to 36 African nations, some of which had several destinations, as in the case of Nigeria, Egypt, and South Africa.

2.2. Consumption of television media and background of soap operas in Africa

The development of the media sector on the African continent has had three distinct stages. The first coincided with the decade of independence (1960s) in which the first presidents co-opted their power and used it (mainly through the written press and the radio) to cement the political projects of the new countries that were created after decolonization. Therefore, they needed a tool capable of transmitting the ideologies and conceptual frameworks that would define the first years of their legislatures.

The second stage had to do with the consequences of the implementation of structural adjustment plans (SAPs) promoted by major international agencies such as the *International Monetary Fund (IMF)* and the *World Bank (WB)* (Bourgault, 1995; Hyden *et al.*, 2007; Ruiz-Cabrera, 2018). These SAPs demanded a reduction of state muscle to face the so-called debt crisis incurred after the independence process. Among the required measures was the liberalization of the media, which meant that African states were forced to purchase audiovisual products from companies mainly from Latin America and Asia to make up for the lack of the national content, the creation of which made state budgets more expensive. These products were cheaper and contained everything, including soap operas, Indian productions, and Asian martial arts series (Biffot, 2018).

The third stage is the current one, in which two realities coexist: public and private television channels that offer free-to-air entertainment content, and the satellite television companies themselves that have specific channels for soap operas, among which the South African *DSTV Multichoice*, the Chinese *StarTimes*, and the French *Canal+* stand out (Ruiz-Cabrera, 2017; Srnicek, 2018). The rise of digital media such as paid platforms has led to significant changes in Africa's media landscape (Conroy-Krutz; Koné, 2020). Although audience and content studies on the African continent are still very scarce, increasing Internet connectivity, a young population, and a growing middle class are factors that indicate that video-on-demand (VoD) subscriptions will reach 13.7 million in 2027, up from 4.89 million at the end of 2021 (Siele, 2023). Nevertheless, it is worth considering the context of each country.

In Senegal, for example,

“Television undoubtedly constitutes the best showcase for the dissemination of fictional films and especially series, which have a growing audience among viewers” (Unesco, 2021, p. 203).

In the case of East Africa, a region where distribution and exhibition networks (cinema, television, video on demand) are led by international multinationals such as *MultiChoice*, *StarTimes*, *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime*, *Showmax*, or *Canal+Afrique*,

“VoD platforms had already attracted a fifth of the Kenyan adult population, in addition to a high consumption of free *YouTube* videos” (Unesco, 2021, p. 140).

In the case of Mozambique, the percentage of people who have access to the Internet is 32%, which means that

“more than two-thirds of Mozambicans still do not have access to the internet and are therefore excluded from the digital world” (Torgusson; Pswarayi-Riddihough, 2022).

It is specifically in the second of the historical stages described above when soap opera broadcasts were introduced on the African continent, and from the 1970s until the 2000s, they had a ubiquitous reach. As the new millennium began, other similar products created in India, the Philippines, and Turkey –which would be more in line with the realities of African audiences and would have even more of a religious focus– emerged (Jedlowski; Rêgo, 2018, p. 2). As different authors have pointed out (Larkin, 1997; 2003; Adamu, 2007; Barlet, 2010; Fair, 2010; Krings, 2015; Banda, 2009; Stern, 2009; Gagliardone, 2013; Zhang; Wasserman; Mano, 2016; Jedlowski; Rösenthaller, 2017), many local producers have found a pattern of success in the production of series since the advent of digital video, not only because of their esthetics and scripts but also because it is a relatively sound business model in itself.

Case studies about soap operas on the African continent are varied; however, the technological development that the media sector and, more specifically, the ecosystem of video-on-demand platforms has undergone since 2010 has led to the current proliferation of private channels specialized in the broadcasting of series and soap operas where they adapt the local situation to the demands of the population. For example, producers in African countries have established agreements with Latin American companies for new adaptations (De-La-Fuente, 2015), with Brazilian companies for the Lusophone sphere of influence (Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, and Mozambique) where these productions can be seen at any time of day (Kone, 2017), or for reruns dubbed into local African languages; for example, in Ghana between July 2016 and April 2017, the Mexican telenovela *Simplemente María* [*Simply Maria*] was dubbed into the Twi language (Tindi; Ayiku, 2018).

Jedlowski and Rêgo explain that the distribution mechanisms of cultural products such as Turkish TV series in Africa would have a political dimension. They indicate that

“these productions are particularly successful among African audiences, not because they are able to offer a model of modernity parallel to the West, but on the other hand, they represent a fantasy world of modern consumerism, an ideal world that creates value from its cultural specificities” (2018, p. 8).

This point is disputed by Anaz and Ozcan by establishing a link between Arab tourism in Turkey and the consumption of Turkish series as they

“are supposed to juxtapose European modernity and Islamic values” (2016, p. 254).

Tinas (2020), with an analysis of the role played by the historical series produced in Turkey and their effects on the audience, or Beurazek (2022), with a case study in Algeria, have stressed the idea that these entertainment products contain a high degree of political propaganda.

Finally, this article's case study would provide two interpretations, as proposed by Rafi (2020, pp. 205-206): to accept, on the one hand, that Turkish series reflect a cultural hybridization since they emanate from a standardized model and,

on the other hand, that they are creations that cannot be compared with soap operas from other regions, since they have particular characteristics according to their broadcasting context. **Ruiz-Cabrera** (2022, p. 166) qualifies that this Turkish format would promote the country's brand and subliminally indoctrinate content that, in some cases, deals with subjects that are taboo in many countries where they are screened.

2.3. Kenya, Senegal, and Mozambique's connection to the Turkish presence in Africa

In the entire East African region, Kenya has established itself as one of the priority countries for many of the international players with a presence in Africa, such as China and Turkey. For Turkey, which is led by Erdoğan, Kenya is an economic and geopolitical magnet. According to the latest figures from the *Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (2023), the volume of bilateral trade between the two countries has continued to increase in recent years, rising from \$234 million in 2019 to \$251 million in 2020.

Statements made by Cemil Miroglu, Turkey's ambassador to Kenya, on the 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the oldest Turkish diplomatic mission in Africa, confirmed that by 2021 the economic figures had risen to \$350 million (**Ngetich**, 2022). In addition to the presence of the *Turkish International Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA)* in health, food, agriculture, livestock, and education projects, 310 scholarships have been awarded to Kenyan students from 1992 to the present.

Mozambique is a country in which both China and Russia have a more predominant presence than Turkey; despite this, the economic figures, with little impact on the media, show how the two nations maintain a progressive and strong relationship, especially since January 15, 2011, the date when an embassy opened in Maputo, the Mozambican capital. In April 2019, the first bilateral political round took place, and according to the latest economic data provided by the Turkish Foreign Ministry, revenues increased from \$115 million in 2016 to \$153 million in 2019. Sixty student scholarships have also been awarded since 1992.

Last, Senegal witnessed how Turkish soft power can be translated into infrastructure by imitating the Chinese model that has worked so well for Beijing and applying it to the African continent. In less than a decade, the Turkish company *Summa-Limak* has built the *Abdou Diouf International Congress Center*, a luxury hotel managed by the international company *Radisson*, a sports center (*Dakar Arena*), an exhibition center, and most recently, the *Abdoulaye Wade* soccer stadium, the inauguration of which Erdoğan himself attended on February 22, 2022—his fifth official visit to Senegal since 2013 (**Du-Couëdic**, 2022). *Blaise Diagne International Airport*, located less than an hour from Dakar, was also completed at the end of 2017. Likewise, in February 2022, the presidents of Senegal and Turkey showed their good relations within the context of the Senegal–Turkey business forum organized in Dakar. In Erdoğan's words, the goal is to reach \$1 billion in the next few years.

3. Methodology and objective of the study

This study analyzes Turkish TV series as a tool of the soft power that Turkey has used in Kenya, Senegal, and Mozambique, especially since 2010. The main objectives of the study are threefold:

- first, to determine where the interviewees stand when it comes to the values that were imposed by their former European colonizers (France, England, and Portugal) and with respect to the Turkish culture to which they are exposed through these cultural products;
- second, to analyze how they perceive Turkish culture; and
- third, to identify how they perceive Turkey.

In this sense, the focus of the study is in line with these research questions:

RQ1: What role do Turkish TV series play in building Turkey's soft power?

RQ2: How does the fact that African audiences watch Turkish TV series affect their perception of Turkey?

RQ3: Do Turkish TV series act as a source of information on the African continent?

This study uses a qualitative research method: the in-depth interview. Depending on the nature of the design, the interviewee may be the source from which all or most of the data are obtained, or the individual may be one of the units in the data collection process (**Boyce; Neale**, 2006; **Gürkan**, 2019). In this context, the focused/semistructured interview technique was used, and an attempt was made to gather information about the respondents' thoughts on the target topic. In-depth interviews were conducted with five respondents in each of the three countries selected, forming a corpus of 15 people who were required to meet the following criteria:

- (i) They had actively followed Turkish TV series produced in the last 10 years.
- (ii) They had watched more than one Turkish TV series.
- (iii) To ensure that the respondents were as representative an audience as possible, various public and private entities were contacted to obtain their collaboration.

The interviewees represented a diverse demographic sample: all interviewees lived in the capitals of the countries analyzed, which are Dakar (Senegal), Nairobi (Kenya), and Maputo (Mozambique); all are graduates (15), of which there are postgraduate students (4) and master's students (2); from a professional perspective, there are staff from public administration (4), education (3), media (2), public relations (1), the cultural sector (1), and full-time students (4).

The researchers of this study are aware that the sample is not representative of the universe, so the findings can be generalized to only a part of the international audience. However, considering that there are similar demographic characteristics (Table 3), those who chose to view content based on the “cultural proximity” hypothesis (Wagner; Kraidy, 2023) showed similar interest in terms of the content of television series and can make similar inferences.

Given that the respondents were interviewed in depth, it is clear that the study had some limitations over the course of the research, and contacting people in all three countries, as well as obtaining their responses, can be cited as the main reasons for the limited sample size. However, these qualitative interviews provided detailed, in-depth, and rich information about the target group. With this approach, the researchers attempted to provide insight into what the selected individuals thought and understood about Turkish culture through popular television series.

Table 1. Questions asked to the respondents

1. On which platform do you watch Turkish TV series?
2. What is/are your favorite Turkish TV series? Who are your favorite characters?
3. Why do you like Turkish TV series?
4. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Turkey?/Could you explain this idea before and after watching the series?
5. Have you been to Turkey? If you haven't been there yet, would you like to visit the country? Why?
6. Are there any details in these series that you find exciting, surprising, or interesting?
7. Has your perception of Turkey changed owing to Turkish TV series?

4. Data analysis

This study proposes that soft power has substantially impacted the perception of Turkey that citizens in African countries have through Turkish television series and, in turn, that television series broadcast on the continent in the last decade have had a political impact on people. An in-depth interview method was used to collect data, taking into account information, cultural characteristics, and experiences within the framework of an ethnographic approach.

In this context, the researchers used text analysis to arrive at the core understanding that includes deeper hidden aspects of meaning by addressing the relevant parts of the statements shared by the respondents (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). To this point, the analysis was carried out in multiple steps without defined categories (Krippendorff, 2004):

I. Interviews were transcribed from English, French, and Portuguese, and notes were taken to understand the deeper hidden meaning of the statements shared by the respondents.

II. Once the text was prepared, it was divided into units of meaning and labeled with codes. Finally, the units of meaning were summarized by dividing them into seven themes (Table 2).

The research sample is not representative of the universe; however, reaching out to people from different countries in Africa was essential to see the similarity of experiences in people facing the same problems. Therefore, the semistructured interview used in the research allowed all respondents, upon answering the same basic questions, to share detailed information about Turkish TV series. Interviews with respondents were conducted between December 2022 and January 2023.

The stages of the research were as follows:

- (i) conceptualize the relationship between soft power, international relations, media, and persuasion;
- (ii) identify the 15 respondents, and complete the interviews with open-ended responses; and
- (iii) discuss the results.

The study coded respondents from the African countries as follows: Mozambique: M1, M2, M3, M4, and M5; Kenya: K1, K2, K3, K4, and K5; and Senegal: S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5 (Table 3).

Table 2. Coding derived from the questions

Coding derived from the questions	The main objective to be achieved
Platforms followed	Understand which platforms they prefer to watch the TV series on
Favorite Turkish TV series and characters	Understand what their favorite TV series and characters are and understand their impact on their perceptions of Turkey
Reasons for this choice	Understand the reasons for watching the TV series and their effect on their thoughts about Turkey
Idea of Turkey	Understand their idea about Turkey
Interest in visiting Turkey	Understand the impact that Turkish TV series have on the audience in the selected countries
Interesting events in the series	Understand what issues and topics affect the audience in the selected African countries
The series' effects	Understand the impact on the perception of Turkey that the selected African audience has

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Code	Country	Sex	Age	Education	Labor sector
M1	Mozambique	M	31	Bachelor's degree	Public administration
M2	Mozambique	F	45	Bachelor's degree	Education
M3	Mozambique	F	29	Bachelor's degree	Public relations
M4	Mozambique	M	30	Bachelor's degree	Media/audiovisual
M5	Mozambique	F	27	Bachelor's degree	Public administration
K1	Kenya	M	35	Master's Degree	Education
K2	Kenya	F	29	Master's student	Student
K3	Kenya	F	35	Master's Degree	Education
K4	Kenya	M	27	Bachelor's degree	Media/audiovisual
K5	Kenya	M	39	Master's student	Cultural sector
S1	Senegal	F	27	Master's student	Student
S2	Senegal	F	19	Bachelor's degree	Student
S3	Senegal	F	31	Master's student	Public administration
S4	Senegal	M	23	Bachelor's degree	Student
S5	Senegal	M	30	Bachelor's degree	Public administration

5. Results and discussion

The study included eight women and seven men, all of whom were over 18 years of age, and they had a variety of occupations. Convenience sampling is a nonrandom method in which the sample that will be selected from the core mass is determined at the discretion of the researcher. In this technique, population data are collected in the easiest, quickest, and most economical way (Malhotra, 2004, p. 321). As a result of the questions asked and the interviews, it is possible to analyze the following topics within the framework:

- i. Viewing platforms
- ii. Favorite Turkish TV series and characters
- iii. Reasons for choosing the series
- iv. Perceptions of Turkey
- v. Interest in visiting Turkey
- vi. Interesting events in the series
- vii. Possible effects of the series

5.1. Viewing platforms

When respondents were asked which platforms they watched TV series on, Mozambican respondents stated that they watched them in different spaces, including national TV channels and the digital platform *Netflix*. M1's response to this question was

"*Netflix* and Mozambique's national TV channel",

whereas M2 and M3 responded that they watch them on Mozambique's national TV channel. M5 remarked,

"I am very proud that my government broadcasts other non-Western content for free on the national channel."

The fact that Turkish TV series are broadcast on a country's national channels shows that the local population continuously and systematically demands this content. On the other hand, it is possible that this is a direct consequence of the continuing lack of Internet connectivity and the low penetration of digital payment platforms in this country.

In contrast, in Kenya, whereas participant K1 claimed that he preferred to watch Turkish series on the platform *Netflix*, K2 shared that she did so on *YouTube*. K3 and K5 consumed these products on the South African digital channel *DSTV* and the Chinese *Star Times*, respectively, and K4 stated that he watched these series on *Netflix*, *YouTube*, and some *Facebook* posts. In addition, K1 noted,

"I love watching Turkish TV series on *Netflix*."

In Senegal, all respondents from S1 to S5 had one thing in common: They consumed Turkish TV series through *Netflix* and *YouTube*. S3 explained,

"my group of friends paid for a *Netflix* subscription to watch international series",

and S4 stated,

"These new Turkish series are really cool, and I'm subscribed to the 'Des séries turquoise' ['The Turkish Series'] channel so I don't miss the latest updates."

From the answers collected for this question, it can be demonstrated that Turkish TV series are accessible and popular on the various platforms such as video on demand, social networks, private channels, or state-run broadcasters. This information would coincide with the current content consumption trends for audiences in Senegal, Kenya, and Mozambique as reflected in the literature review (Conroy-Krutz; Koné, 2020; Unesco, 2021; Torgussonidah; Pswarayi-Riddihough, 2022; Si-ele, 2023).

“The ecosystem of video-on-demand platforms that has existed since 2010 has led to the current proliferation of private channels specialized in the broadcasting of series and soap operas where they adapt the local situation to the demands of the population”

5.2. Favorite Turkish TV series and characters

Respondents gave a variety of answers when asked what their favorite Turkish series were and provided numerous titles of these products, as well as the names of the characters in them.

M1 indicated that his favorite Turkish TV series was *Mrs. Fazilet and her daughters*, and his favorite characters were “Afra Saraçoğlu and Ece Çamkıran Egemen.” M2 mentioned the names of more than 10 series with the detailed descriptions of the characters, whereas M5 said that she loved

“the actress Peris in *Ethos*, and lead actress Burcu Biricik from *Fatma*.”

Comments from Kenyan respondents were also mixed. Whereas K1 indicated that his favorite series was *Diriliş Ertuğrul* [*Resurrection: Ertuğrul*] and his favorite character was Osman, K2 stated that her favorite series was *Sol Yanım* [*My Left Side*] and her favorite characters were Serra and Salim. As their input elucidates, Kenyan respondents watched a wide range of Turkish TV series with romantic, political, or science fiction themes, a dynamic that we believe would increase their interest in Turkey.

In Senegal, the similarity in cultural and religious values is an interesting point to note. S1 and S3 agreed:

“I love *Pleine Lune* [*Full Moon*], and *La Mariée d’Istanbul* [*The Bride of Istanbul*].”

S2 pointed out that

“*Diriliş: Ertuğrul* [*Resurrection: Ertuğrul*] is an incredible take on the Ottoman Empire that I had never heard of before.”

S5 loved *Bir Baskadır* [*Ethos*]

“because it presents a country where the conservatism of the Islamized peoples and the modernity of cities such as Dakar, our capital, coexist. Tradition and modernity on the big screen.”

The fact that all respondents referenced many Turkish TV series and characters in their detailed responses seems to indicate that the African audience is familiar with Turkish TV series as well as Turkish names.

5.3. Reasons for choosing the series

When respondents were asked about their reasons for watching Turkish TV series, they gave comprehensive answers about the characters, the stories, and the local components. M1 reasoned that the series are based on real-life stories that preserve culture and transmit cultural information from one generation to the next. M2 expressed her thoughts as follows:

“First of all, I have to say that I love Brazilian TV series. What saddens me is that they always have the same ending no matter what, so you know what the outcome will be before they end... However, in contrast, the situation is different in Turkish TV series! They always keep you guessing until the last minute, which is exciting for me.”

M3 claimed that, in general, mainstream movies and TV series use female sexuality, but this is not the case with Turkish series, and M5 said,

“I watch Turkish series to learn about the social phenomena prevalent in Turkish society.”

The reasons why Kenyan respondents preferred these products also varied. According to the Kenyan respondents, these narratives have the power to be a meaningful addition and to act as an educational tool. We can conclude that these series have a positive effect on audience development. For example, K2 indicated that

“The plot of the series is very captivating. Turkish series have a way of getting viewers to end up hooked on this fantasy world.”

On the other hand, the comments from K3 and K4 were very similar, stating:

“They are very educational and entertaining.”

K5 noted,

“The Turkish series is a magnificent bundle of drama, music, and acting.”

On the western side of the continent, it seems that Senegalese respondents may feel more affinity with Turkish soap operas owing to links to Islam, according to responses provided by S1, S3, S4, and S5. S1 noted that

“the religious and cultural similarity between Senegal and Turkey is the main motive that make me want to watch Turkish series”,

and S3 said,

“because I want to learn about the customs, traditions, and lifestyle of Turkish society.”

S2, the youngest respondent from Senegal, explained that she watched these series

“to discover Turkish places and landscapes.”

It seems like an interesting idea that some respondents did not claim to have been drawn to Turkish series specifically because they are Turkish. That is, if there is a preexisting affinity that helps this consumption along, some of the respondents were not aware of it. However, the technical and cultural characteristics and the plots or the themes themselves did seem to be causes of these productions’ success. For other respondents, however, curiosity or affinity with Turkish culture seemed to be the primary motive. This could indicate that the interest in audiovisual productions can act in two ways: as a tool of soft power and as a consequence of it.

5.4. Perceptions about Turkey

Respondents gave a variety of answers about Turkey and Turkish culture. For example, M1 responded that the first thing that came to mind about Turkey was the racial context. According to him, in a society in which white people are in the majority, there is class privilege:

“I think anyone can be rich because they’re predominantly white.”

M2 answered this question by saying

“It is a country with beautiful cities. The culinary culture is vibrant and diverse.”

Meanwhile, M3 summarized her response as follows:

“Delicate fabrics, beautiful landscapes, scents and aromas.”

Finally, M4 stated that, when people talk about Turkey, they think of its cultural and historical richness and of a tourist spot.

Comments from Kenyan respondents had various and compelling responses, including creativity, fashion, shopping malls, and a life of leisure. For example, K1 pointed out that

“Before you may think that Turkey has series that are broadcast all over the world, it is a country where there is a lot of creativity and fashion, but certainly after the series, it makes it a certainty that some characters are real.”

In contrast, K2 commented,

“The first thing that comes to mind about Turkey is that it is a wonderful shopping destination. After seeing these Turkish products, I feel it is a beautiful country to visit for touristic purposes.”

On the other hand, K3 stated,

“Fashion... After watching the series, I still see Turks as fashionable people.”

In Senegal, S2 and S3 had similar responses: Whereas S2 explained,

“my view of Turkey and Turks in general changed after watching their series...”,

S3 said,

“watching Turkish series enriches knowledge and cultural balance regarding Turkey in general.”

The rich culinary culture was something that S5 emphasized:

“I think Turks are passionate about food. Maybe we’ll have to trade traditional French food for Mediterranean food.”

S4 was surprised by the effect that these series had had on his life:

“Before watching Turkish series I thought Turks were very conservative, but I admit that now I have a good idea of its people’s personality.”

Based on the respondents’ answers, the Turkish series would depict a successful Turkey with upper-middle class people and beautiful landscapes and cities, and would highlight some Turkish cultural characteristics such as gastronomy and hospitality.

“ In Senegal, in addition to providing a proliferation of series, Turkey has built several facilities, such as cultural and exhibition centers, soccer stadiums, and the country’s new airport, in less than a decade ”

5.5. Interest in visiting Turkey

When respondents were asked if they had been to Turkey or if they would like to visit the country after watching these series and why, M1 said that he had not yet visited but would like to very much:

“Because as a neighboring country, I want to see the differences between Turkey and China and other countries, the value of being able to live there and know the Turkish culture.”

M2 noted,

“I would love to visit Turkey to admire its landscapes, taste the food, and see the clothing styles; I want to dance and meet some actors there.”

M3, on the other hand, stated that she had not yet visited Turkey but that she wanted to check out its stores, its shopping malls, and the different cities. In addition, she stated that she wanted to listen to Turkish music and experience the culinary culture. M5 knew that she was interested because

“after the Covid-19 pandemic, I looked at airline tickets to travel to Istanbul.”

The comments of the Kenyan respondents were similar to those of the Mozambicans. K1 and K2 stated that they had never been to Turkey but found the country charming, and they added that they identified with the characters and felt as if they were there while watching the series. This idea of identity is the backbone of these types of productions, and therefore, the producers try to make the audience see themselves while watching the scenes on the screen. K3, in this regard, stated that she had not yet visited Turkey, but that she wanted to go and was particularly curious about its culture. K4's commented,

“I'd be happier than ever before... I would like to travel to Turkey, meet the major series producers, pick up good filming skills, meet new business-minded people, and learn something about the experience of Turkish life.”

From K4's understanding, Turkey is also an epicenter for the audiovisual world. In addition, K5 explained,

“I have never been to Turkey, but I would love to go and visit because I think Turkey is a country rich in culture, architecture, delicious delicacies, and beautiful scenery, and it is a shopper's delight.”

In the Senegalese responses, soft power's role in promoting another image of Turkey is a crucial point. S1 and S5 explained that these products have played an important role in the dissemination of Turkish culture in Senegal. S3 notes,

“honestly, I had always thought of Turkey as a country under construction, with a lot of poverty and not much cultural interest. I know it was pure ignorance since no one ever told us about this country in school or in the media. Now, however, I'm looking forward to going.”

S4 finished his response by saying that

“Turkish series encourage the viewer to learn the Turkish language because it is a mixture of French and Arabic sounds.”

These respondents' comments revealed that Turkish cultural and consumer characteristics –such as daily life, shopping, and food or drinks– are prominent elements in these series and that the audience is influenced by them –factors already mentioned in the literature review by authors such as **Balaban** (2015), **Ağırseven** and **Örki** (2017), **Zafer**, **Göksu**, and **Yavaşgel** (2018), **Larcher** (2019), **Rafi** (2020), **Tinas** (2020), and **Beurazek** (2022).

“ The distribution mechanisms of cultural products such as Turkish TV series in Africa would have a political dimension ”

5.6. Interesting events in the series

When the respondents were asked whether there were any details in the Turkish TV series that attracted them and that they found interesting, the responses were as follows: M1 said,

“yes, women hope to be rich someday and set forth their children to spend more time without seeing the clergy, which is exciting to me.”

M2 noted,

“The thrilling endings of Turkish dramas made me give up Brazilian TV series, which are always shocking. We don't find objectified women in Turkish series.”

M4 stated that historical places and buildings in particular were fascinating, and M5 mentioned,

“*Hot Skull* took over my life for weeks. I was talking to friends about the consequences of Covid-19 and the dystopian world of this series.”

Meanwhile, the scenes and themes that Kenyan respondents find different and exciting also varied. For example, K1 emphasized that he identifies with the characters and narratives. K2 similarly commented,

“It's exciting to see how the series portrays people's normal lives, how rich and poor people fall in love, how people use their beauty to attract rich men and the typical love triangle overlaid with jealousy on campuses.”

K2's interpretation shows that these narratives construct an exaggerated Turkish dream. K3 responded,

"betrayal in the business organization",

which shows how the business world is presented in an archetypal way and affects the audience. K4 commented,

"I still wonder where the producers get those incredible skills and viewpoints."

K5 stated that he found the family relationships in these series very interesting, noting the cozy breakfasts and dinners.

Interviewees from Senegal also responded with a variety of exciting events. For example, S1 and S4 explained the importance of humor in the script. S4 said,

"I think we need more good vibes in the world, and this is the way to change that."

In addition, S3 stressed the importance of food when discussing serious topics.

"I guess this is a Mediterranean tradition. Conversation and fun around food. However, for many years this idea came to us only through Hollywood and French cinema films, and I thought that Turkey, as a Muslim country, was removed from that."

S2 thanked these Turkish products for providing a glimpse of the other side of the world, and S5 also mentioned it:

"*Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne?* [*What Is Fatmagül's Fault?*] shows the place in society of woman who fights against a taboo such as forced marriage in my country. This is great!."

These comments show that Turkey has become a center of attraction thanks to Turkish series through the use of specific motifs such as their countering of the dominant narrative created by the West or the representations of cities, the characters themselves, or everyday life.

5.7. Possible effects of the series

Finally, respondents were asked whether their perceptions of Turkey had changed after watching these series. M1 and M5 stated that their thoughts had changed because they used to think of Turkey as a poorer country, but after seeing these products, they began to think that economically it was more important. M2 shared,

"I didn't think of Turkey as a country with such a rich culture, but my opinion changed completely thanks to the TV series."

The fact that all respondents referenced many Turkish TV series and characters in their detailed responses indicates that a part of the audience in the African countries analyzed is familiar with Turkish TV series, as well as with the names of Turkish characters and places

M3 stated that the series had had a positive effect on her view of the country, and M4 made similar comments, stating that his perception of Turkey had changed for the better and that he had not known the country had so much historical richness.

Comments from Kenyan respondents on this topic are as follows: K1 stated that Turkey is the best producer of soap operas in the world and that everything he saw in TV series was attractive. K2, on the other hand, said:

"Not really... But the series has improved the beautiful image I already had of the country."

Similarly, K3 described Turkey as an

"ideal place to live."

K4 said,

"I find the country incredible, capable, unique."

Finally, K5 stated that he had favorable opinions about Turkey before watching its series, but this image had become even more positive.

From Senegal, S5 gave an interesting response:

"I believe that watching these series spreads tolerance and honesty among members of society."

In this regard, S2 also mentioned that she changed her perception of Turkey and said,

"it makes you pay more attention to family relationships."

S4 claimed that, after having experience in urban planning, he

"could not believe Turkey's richness when it came to modern buildings and cities."

S1 stated that these series promoted the commercial part of the country, and S3 said,

"I don't know much about international politics, but I am sure that these cultural products, of which I love, are helping to change the idea of the Turkish people in Senegal. We have many buildings in the capital built by Turkey, so the series will help them change the Senegalese's perception."

Comments from these respondents showed that Turkish TV series have positively changed and that they have created new perceptions about topics such as music, fashion, cuisine, daily life, architecture, and consumer habits.

“The broadcasting of this Turkish content, in particular on Mozambican national channels, would imply Mozambique’s affinity toward Turkey”

6. Conclusions

This research analyzed the role of Turkish television series in three African countries –as a source of information about Turkey, as products of the creative cultural industry that can be evaluated in the framework of international public relations, and in building Turkey’s soft power. By focusing on Senegal, Kenya, and Mozambique, this study has expanded the insight into the new consumption dynamics of these Sub-Saharan African societies. There were three main characteristics that defined these trends: the change in perception experienced by viewers after viewing, the positive outlook on the sociocultural and spiritual reality of Turkey, and the preference for choosing this country as a possible tourist destination.

This study has focused on African audiences, exploring their perceptions of Turkish history and culture. In the first research questions, it aimed to reveal whether Turkish-produced series are used as an element of soft power in the countries analyzed. The fact that these audiovisual productions had attracted the attention of the interviewed audience revealed that they can be a good resource to entertain, educate, and inform about historical or cultural elements. In the case of Mozambique, the series can be seen on national television, suggesting the government’s affinity for the country ruled by Erdoğan. It is clear that there is a relationship between the existence of Turkish foreign policy and the consumption of the series, and that the series build a positive image of Turkey in Senegal, Kenya, and Mozambique as part of its soft power.

The second research question was intended to reveal whether or not Africans’ perceptions changed owing to watching Turkish television series. Respondents who stated that they admired Turkish culture also demonstrated a mastery of the names of the main characters or cities that appeared on the screen. It is interesting to note that none of the countries analyzed had had a previous historical relationship with this content, as has traditionally occurred with the audiovisual products exported by the former colonial powers France, England, and Portugal, or with the countries producing telenovelas in Latin America. It is clear that there is a favorable bias toward Turkey, as emphasized by the Mozambican and Kenyan respondents.

The third research question aimed to determine whether Turkish television series acted as a source of information on the African continent, and it has been observed that this content was essential in promoting Turkish culture, customs, and traditions among African viewers. Finally, the study summarized that the image of Turkey shown in these African countries, analyzed through the series, positively emphasized Turkey’s historical and religious ties, its traditional component, a sense of nostalgia, its cultural identity, its scenic beauty, and the dynamism of its business world.

“Turkish TV series have positively changed the view of African consumers and have created new perceptions about topics such as music, fashion, cuisine, daily life, architecture, and consumer habits”

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