



The influence of Turkish TV series on Generation Z in South Africa: An exploratory study

Türk TV dizilerinin Güney Afrika'daki Z Kuşağı üzerindeki etkisi: Keşifsel bir çalışma

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Abstract

The worldwide popularity of Turkish TV series has been steadily growing. TV series, which became increasingly popular in geographies close to Türkiye, especially in the early 2000s, reached a worldwide reputation in the following years, and this success made positive contributions to public opinion about Türkiye. This study examines the popularity of Turkish TV series around the world and Türkiye's relations with South Africa within the framework of Türkiye's changing African policies in the last quarter century. The aim of the study is to investigate whether Generation Z in South Africa watches Turkish TV series, to determine which series are popular among them, to determine how their perception of Türkiye changes after watching these series, and to contribute to the academic literature on Türkiye's soft power in South Africa. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were conducted with audiences from various ethnic groups and genders living in different cities in South Africa. The study clearly showed that the participants generally had positive impressions about Türkiye's culture, nature, fashion and people through Turkish TV series. Moreover, many expressed a desire to visit Türkiye based on information from Turkish TV series, indicating a positive change in perceptions among Generation Z in South Africa.

Keywords: TV series, Türkiye, South Africa, perception of Türkiye, soft power

Öz

Türk TV dizilerinin dünya çapında popülarlığı her geçen yıl artmaktadır. Özellikle 2000'li yılların başlarında Türkiye'ye yakın coğrafyalarda giderek popüler hale gelen TV dizileri, sonraki yıllarda dünya çapında bir üne ulaşmış ve bu başarı Türkiye'nin dünya kamuoyundaki algısına olumlu katkılar sağlamıştır. Bu çalışmada öncelikle Türk TV dizilerinin dünya genelinde yakaladığı popülarlık ve Türkiye'nin son çeyrek asırda değişen Afrika politikaları çerçevesinde Güney



Afrika ile ilişkileri ele alınmıştır. Çalışmanın amacı Güney Afrika'daki Z kuşağının Türk dizilerini izleyip izlemediğini araştırmak, hangi dizilerin onlar arasında popüler olduğunu belirlemek, bu dizileri izledikten sonra Türkiye algılarının nasıl değiştiğini tespit etmek ve Türkiye'nin Güney Afrika'daki yumuşak gücüne dair akademik literatüre katkı sağlamaktır. Bu amaçla, Güney Afrika'nın farklı şehirlerinde yaşayan, çeşitli etnik grup ve cinsiyetten izleyicilerle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Çalışma sonucunda katılımcıların genel olarak Türk TV dizileri aracılığıyla

Türkiye'nin kültürü, doğası, modası ve insanları hakkında olumlu izlenimler edindikleri açıkça görülmüştür. Ayrıca, katılımcıların büyük bir kısmının Türk TV dizilerini izledikten sonra öğrendikleri bilgilere dayanarak Türkiye'yi ziyaret etme arzusunu dile getirmeleri, Güney Afrika'daki Z kuşağının Türkiye'ye ilişkin algılarında olumlu yönde bir değişim yaşandığını işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: TV dizileri, Türkiye, Güney Afrika, Türkiye algısı, yumuşak güç

Introduction

Turkish TV series (*dizi* in Turkish) have a worldwide reputation that extends from the Balkans to the Middle East, from Central Asia to Russia, from South America to Africa (Algan & Kaptan, 2023; Aslan, 2019; M. H. Bilgin et al., 2016; Cassano Iturri, 2021; Ferreira, 2023; Rakhmani & Zakiah, 2020; Ruiz-Cabrera & Gürkan, 2023). The TV series can serve as a powerful form of mass communication that can infiltrate people's lives and influence their perceptions, behaviours, and preferences. The popularity of foreign TV programs in a country can influence the viewers' perceptions of the country of origin and the related products (Köksal & Gjana, 2015). Turkish series have transcended their initial financial and entertainment purposes to become an important tool for Türkiye's soft power and play a significant role in the country's foreign policy strategy. These series have not only captured global audiences, but have also enhanced Türkiye's cultural diplomacy, particularly under the Justice and Development Party (JDP) government, which strategically aligned the global success of these series with its broader foreign policy goals (Berg, 2017, p. 49). Soft power, as defined by Joseph Nye (1990), is the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion, relying on cultural and ideological appeal rather than military or economic force.

TV series stand out as a significant instrument within the cultural resources of soft power. Because they not only provide information to the audiences about the culture and lifestyle of the country of origin but also contribute positively to the image of the country. This phenomenon underscores the effectiveness of soft power in shaping international relations and highlights the potential of cultural sources to change or strengthen national images (Gallarotti, 2011).

Turkish foreign policy has experienced significant changes during the past twenty-five years. Türkiye has expanded its diplomatic relations through numerous institutions and organizations, with a special emphasis on Africa. In this context, 1998 was a significant turning point in Türkiye's relations with Africa. The African Action Plan, released in 1998, clearly sets out Türkiye's goal of strengthening economic, political, and cultural ties with African countries. The Year of Africa, declared in 2005, is another important development that shows that Turkish-African relations are entering a new phase (Oğurlu, 2017, p. 48; Öztürk & Duman, 2023). With this new approach of Turkish foreign policy, Türkiye's influence has expanded beyond the North Africa, which was the part of Ottoman Empire, and has actively sought to build closer relations with the countries

in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). During this period, Türkiye's endeavours towards South Africa, one of the prominent nations in SSA, has gained significant momentum.

In fact, the relations between Türkiye and South Africa can be traced back to the 19th century, especially in terms of cultural contacts. According to Sıradağ (2017) the impact of Abubakr Effendi, an Ottoman scholar sent to South Africa in 1862 to provide religious education, in South Africa was substantial in comprehending the depth of enduring historical connections between the two nations. The bilateral relations between the two nations declined in the years after the formation of the Republic of Türkiye. However, towards the end of the 20th century, they began to develop again in accordance with Türkiye's evolving policies towards the African continent. As a matter of fact, Türkiye continues to attempt to increase its sphere of influence in South Africa through its diplomatic and commercial efforts and numerous institutions (Çetinkuş et al., 2018, pp. 93-116). For this purpose, Yunus Emre Institute, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TCCA), and Maarif Foundation, which are Türkiye's main public diplomacy tools, have started to operate in South Africa (Bilgin & Karaman, 2020, p. 272). In addition, Turkish Airlines started flights to eliminate the physical distance between two countries.

Starting from the assumption that TV series play a decisive role in creating a positive perception of the country of origin, this study examines if the perceptions of the Generation Z age group in South Africa about Türkiye as a country have changed after watching a Turkish TV series. Within the theoretical framework of the study, the focus is on the popularity of Turkish TV series worldwide, Türkiye's presence on the African continent, especially in South Africa, and the contribution of popular culture products such as television series to the image of Türkiye in the minds of audiences. Furthermore, this study aims to contribute to the growing academic literature on Türkiye's recent and increasingly prominent involvement in the African continent. To achieve this aim, information was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using qualitative methods. The significance of the study lies in its uniqueness in examining Turkish TV series in South Africa and their impact on perceptions of Türkiye.

Turkish TV series with rising popularity around the world

It is known that television series with international popularity help the countries of origin to gain a positive perception in the eyes of the other nations and to increase the

soft power potential of origin countries (Berg, 2017; Ruiz-Cabrera & Gürkan, 2023). Therefore, cultural productions such as TV series are important tools to create a favourable image of the origin countries in the international arena. Türkiye has been one of these countries and utilizing TV series to improve its image since the mid-2000s on a worldwide scale.

According to Kaptan and Algan (2020, p. 12) the internationalisation of the Turkish TV industry started as a temporary measure against content theft abroad. After the success of the Turkish TV products in the world market, Turkish TV executives endeavoured to sustain the growth and global expansion. Accordingly, to remain globally competitive, the industry has engaged in participating in cross-border TV fairs, collaborating with global distributors, allocating large budgets for marketing and publicity, conducting marketing research to understand what is in demand in the market, and partnering with multiple content carriers such as *Netflix* to make its contents available to more people, both in the country itself and around the world (Algan, 2020).

Since then, a growing number of Turkish TV series have been exported to different markets and have also reached high prices and ratings from watchers worldwide (Yesil, 2015). The *Gümüş* (Noor in Arabic) TV series represents a tipping point for the transnationalization of Turkish TV series. *Gümüş* has not been the first Turkish TV series to be retailed to the foreign market but has become a hit on Arab television. ('Inside Islam's Culture War,' 2012). In fact, approximately 80 million people in the Arab world watched the final episode of the *Gümüş* series in 2008 (Nosratian, 2015).

Millions of viewers in over 150 countries watch Turkish TV series each year. The first Turkish TV series to be exported was in 1981, when the series *Aşk-ı Memnu* was shown in France (Uştuk, 2019). Since then, Türkiye's TV series have seen a remarkable rise in global demand, particularly between 2020 and 2023, establishing Türkiye as the world's third-largest exporter of TV series, closely following the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (Keskin, 2024; The Third-Largest Exporter of Television Is Not Who You Might Expect, 2024). This achievement marks a historic milestone in which Turkish media content has reached a broad global audience for the first time (Özarlan, 2020). With international sales and a strong global following, Turkish series are particularly popular in Latin America, Korea, China and Russia (Bhutto, 2019). Recently, the global distributor Eccho Rights concluded agreements leading to the licensing of the Turkish drama series *Yalı Çapkını* (Golden Boy in English) in more than 100 countries (*Golden*

Boy sold to more than 100 countries, 2023). Türkiye earned approximately \$600 million from the export of its TV series in 2022. This significant revenue reflects the increasing global demand for Turkish TV series and shows that the country has become a major exporter in the international television industry (Alakent, 2022; Keskin, 2024; The Third-Largest Exporter of Television Is Not Who You Might Expect, 2024).

Within slightly more than ten years, Turkish media has been exerting influence in regions that are both geographically and culturally distant from Türkiye. As a result, Turkish TV series have emerged as an alternative to the prominent (Western) media flow (Ferreira, 2023). According to Aslan's (2019, p. 47) research on Latin American TV viewers, the cultural sources of the media come from the West, especially from the USA. However, considering the impact of Turkish TV series in Chile, she states that Turkish TV series have the capability to alter the mainstream media flow. Similarly, Berg (2023, p. 22) states that the Western-centred media flow is losing its dominance and that a diversified and decentralised media environment may gradually gain power. The intense interest in Turkish TV series around the world is one of the most significant proofs of this trend. These series have spread Türkiye's influence across political, economic, and cultural spheres worldwide, including in Africa, where their growing popularity has fostered deeper cultural ties (Khalid, 2023). The fact that they are watched with admiration in African countries, for example Sudan (Donelli, 2019, p. 128), is an important indicator that Türkiye is expanding its soft power capacity in Africa as well.

Relations with South Africa in the context of Türkiye's changing African policy

With the swift elevation of Africa's prominence in global politics, there has been a corresponding escalation in competition for influence over the continent (Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu, 2019, p. 2). In addition to China, India, and Russia, Türkiye made the strategic decision to enhance its economic involvement with Africa, coinciding with the ascension of the current ruling JDP. Simultaneously, Türkiye has been strengthening its soft power in Africa via the construction of infrastructure, expansion of its military footprint, active involvement in humanitarian assistance, and the global dissemination of cultural products (Ruiz-Cabrera & Gürkan, 2023).

As discussed above, the Turkish presence in Africa has a lengthy historical background due to the Ottoman dominion in the northern part of the continent. Nevertheless, since the formation of contemporary Türkiye, the Ottoman legacy has undergone a

significant process of fragmentation (Sıradağ, 2017, p. 9). The perception of modern Türkiye on the African continent has changed since 1998. Türkiye implemented a new policy named the 'Opening up to Africa Policy' in 1998. Afterwards, Türkiye aimed to enhance its economic, political, and cultural connections with African nations under this framework (Ozkan, 2010, p. 534). Türkiye is a relatively new extra-regional player, with its active and consistent involvement since 2005, referred to as the 'Year of Africa' in Türkiye. Over the past fifteen years, Türkiye has established a notable position as an extra-regional partner, aligning itself with the growing powers that have deepened their connections with African nations (Donelli, 2021, pp. 2–3). In the last two decades, Türkiye has established and maintained its connections with African nations through diplomatic missions, bilateral agreements across various sectors, and the operations of prominent institutions such as TCCA, Turkish Airlines, the Turkish Maarif Foundation, and the Yunus Emre Institute (Kavak & Aktas, 2021).

South Africa is one of the countries that Türkiye is trying to improve its relations with as part of its African policy. Although the Turkish Embassy in South Africa opened in Pretoria in 1994, the diplomatic ties between Türkiye and South Africa originated from the 19th century (Gençoğlu, 2022). Nevertheless, during the past eight decades since the inception of the Republic of Türkiye, this association has remained limited. The accession of the JDP in 2002 has brought about significant transformations in Türkiye's foreign policy including utilizing several economic, political, and social means to enhance its ties with South Africa (Sıradağ, 2017).

Prior to Türkiye's engagement with Africa, South Africa was the sole sub-Saharan African nation to open a diplomatic mission in Ankara (Wheeler, 2011, p. 49). Türkiye's initial diplomatic travels to SSA at the level of the prime minister was to South Africa or Ethiopia, highlighting the bilateral connections between Türkiye and South Africa. Prime Minister Erdoğan's visits marked a significant advancement in Türkiye's evolving Africa strategy (Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu, 2012, p. 86).

In Türkiye's Africa strategy, South Africa is acknowledged as a significant nation on the continent, while for South Africa, Türkiye holds a crucial position as a partner in the Middle East. Both countries have a common perspective on the importance of maintaining peace and promoting progress in African continent, as well as addressing the sophisticated situation in Palestine and Israel. Additionally, the trade and investment links between Türkiye and South Africa are particularly striking (Bishku, 2019). Trade

links between Türkiye and South Africa have increased approximately tenfold in the last 15 years (Yetkin, 2018, p. 137). In addition, the mutual diplomatic visits by heads of state have also contributed to the development of relations (Bishku, 2019).

The coming together of the two countries' leaders at the BRICS¹ summits played a crucial role in the development of a shared agenda for the future. Türkiye has substantially increased its involvement in a variety of sectors in South Africa. The Yunus Emre Institute, which is in Johannesburg, South Africa, is actively engaged in cultural and artistic activities. TCCA provides technical and development support, the Turkish Maarif Foundation is involved in education, and the Red Crescent and Green Crescent are involved in humanitarian assistance activities. Furthermore, Turkish and South African non-governmental organisations are collaborating to enhance cultural links. Attempts have been made to enhance the economic collaboration between the two nations, building upon their political, military, and cultural ties (Bilgin & Karaman, 2020, p. 280).

The media also plays an important role in strengthening Türkiye's influence and image in South Africa. Turkish TV series are broadcast on e.tv, one of South Africa's most important independent media outlets. As a result, South African viewers gain a deeper understanding and interest in Türkiye as a country. Bengü Okur Erdoğan, the Commercial Counsellor at the Embassy of Türkiye in Pretoria, emphasised the popularity of Turkish films and TV series in South Africa. She specifically highlighted the interest in productions that portray both contemporary and historical themes, and which are even translated into the Afrikaans language (Türkiye-Güney Afrika Ticaret Hacminde Rekor, 2023).

Aim and methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate if, after watching Turkish Television series, the Generation Z age group in South Africa experience an increased positive opinion of Türkiye and Turkish people. In line with this purpose, the research questions of the study were determined as follows:

1. What percentage of Generation Z individuals in South Africa regularly watch Turkish Television series?

2. Which Turkish Television series are most frequently watched by Generation Z in South Africa, and what factors contribute to their popularity?
3. How have the perceptions of Türkiye and Turkish people among Generation Z in South Africa changed after watching Turkish Television series?
4. How does the consumption of Turkish Television series by Generation Z in South Africa reflect and contribute to the understanding of Türkiye's soft power on the African continent?

These research questions lead to the following objectives of the study:

- To establish if the Generation Z age group in South Africa watch Turkish Television series.
- To identify which of the Turkish Television series are most popular among the Generation Z age group in South Africa.
- To determine if and how the perceptions of Generation Z in South Africa about Türkiye had changed after watching Turkish Television series.
- To contribute to the body of scholarly literature on the influence of Türkiye's soft power on the African continent.

In line with the purpose of the study, questions were asked to Generation Z. According to Seemiller and Grace (2019), Generation Z is defined as those born between 1995 and 2010. People in this age group do not limit themselves to traditional media when it comes to watching TV series and they also prefer new media and social media tools. Hardey (2011) defines this age group by emphasizing the state of being connected to the internet and calls them Generation C. These factors were considered when selecting a group to study, because of their chances of accessing and watching these series compared to other groups. Therefore, the study focused on Generation Z because they are more likely to watch Turkish TV series on different platforms than other generations in South Africa.

The study adopts a qualitative method research design, incorporating an interpretative constructivist research approach to comprehensively examine the research problem as stated above. Interpretivists argue that knowledge is created internally within different settings by human interpretation of the world, which is influenced by personal experiences and interactions with others (Coetzee, 2015, p. 110; Kop & Hill, 2008, p. 5). The constructivist approach is a perspective that is generally utilised in qualitative research. Research conducted with this approach is based on the views of the participants on the subject being analysed as much as possible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 45–46).

This study employs semi-structured interview questions to delve into the perceptions and opinions of participants to seek answers to the questions of what role Turkish TV series play in influencing South African Generation Z viewer's perception of Türkiye and its culture; and whether Turkish TV series can be seen as a source of information about Türkiye as a country. Structured survey questions are used to provide demographic information of participants, including age, race, gender, and geographical location in South Africa. The participant responses were numbered and their identities not revealed. In addition, ethics committee permission for the interviews was obtained from Central University of Technology (CUT), Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa (Resolution number: 23/01/2024/1).

The study's population was based on the Generation Z age group living in South Africa and random snowball sampling was used to find respondents willing to participate in the study. Snowball sampling refers to an iterative process in which respondents were asked to identify and motivate other available respondents (Brettle, 2003, p. 3; Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, p. 87). Qualifying respondents were asked to forward the information about the study to their friends, asking if they are willing to participate in this research. If the person agrees, they sent an email with their cell number and the answers to the demographic information to the researcher in South Africa, who then phoned them for the interview, which was based on the open-ended questions. The response rate was very low, but the researchers take the 24 positive responses as representative of the Generation Z age group, representing black, coloured and white people between ages 18 and 26 in South Africa from a variety of locations in the country. Unfortunately, the amount of people not willing to participate in the study could not be established as respondents did not indicate exactly how many other people they asked to participate who responded negatively.

Copilot AI and ChatGPT, which are generative artificial intelligence tools, were used to categorise the responses obtained from the participants into themes. These tools, which provide significant time savings especially in entering data, coding and determining themes, facilitate better analysis of the data with in-depth comments and nuances of the researchers (Morgan, 2023; Perkins & Roe, 2024). In this study, artificial intelligence tools were utilised to categorise the data obtained from the interviews into themes.

The research analysis consists of thematic qualitative data analysis to identify common themes and patterns within the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6; Gray, 2014, p. 675), as well as quantitative data analysis using cross-tabulation with contingency tables to determine statistically significant demographic information about the respondents (Given, 2008, p. 212).

Findings

This study proposes that Turkish TV series plays a crucial role in creating a positive opinion of Türkiye and Turkish people among the Generation Z age group in South Africa. Firstly, demographic information about the respondents were asked, including their age, gender, race and where in South Africa they reside. The 24 respondents were aged between 19 and 26, mostly female (17), with six (6) male respondents and one (1) who identified as other. Of the 24 respondents, eleven (11) were of the white race group, eight (8) were coloured and five (5) were black (see Table 1).

As seen in the previous paragraph, all respondents belong to the Generation Z group and Table 1 below provides the rest of the demographic information. Nine (9) of the respondents reside in Bloemfontein and it is assumed that the reason is because CUT is located in Bloemfontein. Most respondents (17) are female, which can be attributed to the snowball sampling the researcher relied on to find respondents. As mentioned above, most of the respondents (9) are from Bloemfontein, while the rest of the respondents reside either north of Bloemfontein, or to the far west of the country.

Table 1. Demographic information of respondents

RESIDENCE CITY/TOWN	RACE (24)			GENDER (24)		
	BLACK (B)	WHITE (W)	COLOURED (C)	FEMALE (F)	MALE (M)	OTHER (O)
Bloemfontein	2	4	3	6	3	
Cape Town		1	1	1	1	
Fouriesburg		1		1		
Johannesburg			1	1		
Kimberley	1		2	3		
Kroonstad		2		2		
Pretoria		1		1		
Springbok			1	1		
Thaba Nchu	1				1	
Welkom	1	1			1	1
Worcester		1		1		
TOTAL	5	11	8	17	6	1

The next question asked respondents if they watched Turkish television series. Nineteen (19) of the respondents answered yes, while five (5) indicated that they do not watch Turkish television series. From the five (5) respondents who indicated that they do not watch Turkish television series, eight (8) reasons were given; not interested (3); do not watch TV (3); not sure (1); and too busy (1). Cross-tabulation found that four (4) of the five (5) respondents live in Bloemfontein and one (1) in Kimberley. Four (4) are 23 years of age and one (1) is 22, and that there are three (3) males and two (2) females in this group, of which three (3) are coloured, one (1) is white and one (1) is black. From this analysis it can be assumed that these five (5) respondents are a group of friends or students who completed the forms together and, in the process, influenced each other.

The next question asked respondents to indicate the platform or platforms they use to access Turkish television Series. The nineteen (19) respondents listed 53 platforms, which are grouped into the following twelve (12), of which *YouTube* was the most popular (20.75%), while *Netflix* and *e.tv* second most popular, at 15% each. Figure 1 below shows that *OpenView*, *Turkwood*, *Turkish 123.com* and *ePlesier* are also popular platforms on which respondents watch Turkish Television series.

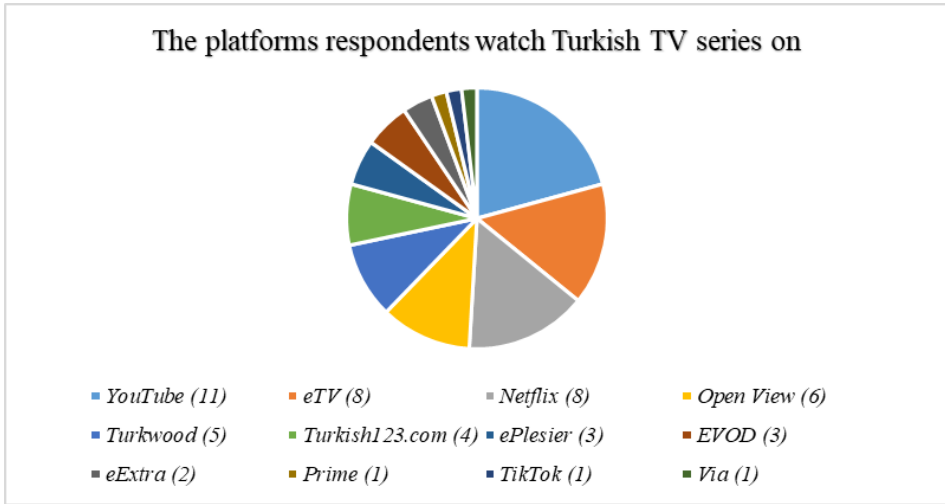


Figure 1. The platforms where respondents watch Turkish TV series

As explained by Bengü Okur Erdoğan, the Commercial Counsellor at the Embassy of Türkiye in Pretoria, there are many Turkish television series translated into other languages, including Afrikaans (Türkiye-Güney Afrika Ticaret Hacıminde Rekor, 2023). The Facebook page of Turkish series ZA, dated 12 August 2023, announced that 44 'outstanding Turkish series' have been dubbed into Afrikaans, while many online Turkish series are available in English and in other languages. Respondents were asked to list their favourite Turkish television series on a list from Favourite 1 to Favourite 4. Most respondents listed more than one series, with one respondent mentioning that all seven (7) titles she gave, were her favourites. A total of 61 responses were summarised into 29 titles. The number of times a title was mentioned, was taken as an indication of the popularity of the series. Table 2 below provides an indication of the titles of the Turkish TV series respondents mentioned, listed from most to least popular. For the purpose of this article the Turkish title and the title in Afrikaans and/or English are provided. Titles in red are the series mentioned, indicating that fifteen (15) series are watched by the respondents in the Afrikaans language, and fourteen (14) other titles are watched in English.

Table 2. Turkish TV series as listed by respondents

Number of TV Series	Number of Participants	Afrikaans Title	English Title	Turkish Title	Genre	Gender	Race
1	6	<i>Dis Complicated</i>	<i>Love is in the Air</i>	<i>Sen Çal Kapımı</i>	Romance	FFFFMF	BCWWCW
2	5	<i>Elif</i>	<i>Elif</i>	<i>Elif</i>	Family	FFFFM	CWWWC
3	3		<i>My Left Side</i>	<i>Sol Yanım</i>	Drama	FFF	CBB
4	3	<i>Roekelose Dade</i>	<i>Life Song</i>	<i>Hayat Şarkısı</i>	Romance	MFF	BWW
5	3	<i>Die Vreemdeling</i>	<i>Brave and Beautiful</i>	<i>Cesur ve Güzel</i>	Romance	MFF	WWW
6	3	<i>Annekan' Die Swa 'Kry</i>	<i>For My Family</i>	<i>Kardeşlerim</i>	Family	FMF	WCW
7	2		<i>Endless Love</i>	<i>Kara Sevda</i>	Romance	FF	CB
8	2		<i>Establishment: Osman</i>	<i>Kuruluş: Osman</i>	Historical Drama	FF	CB
9	2	<i>Gebroke Harte</i>	<i>Broken Pieces</i>	<i>Paramparça</i>	Romance	FF	WW
10	2	<i>Dokter Ali</i>	<i>Miracle Doctor</i>	<i>Mucize Doktor</i>	Medical Drama	FF	WW
11	2		<i>Black Money Love</i>	<i>Kara Para Aşk</i>	Crime	OF	BC
12	2	<i>Moederhart</i>		<i>Kanatsız Kuşlar</i>	Drama	FF	WC
13	2		<i>Heartbeat</i>	<i>Kalp Atışı</i>	Romance	FF	WC
14	1		<i>Oath</i>	<i>Yemin</i>	Drama	F	B
15	1	<i>Deur Dik en Dun</i>	<i>Evermore</i>	<i>İstanbullu Gelin</i>	Romance	F	W
16	1		<i>Black Pearl</i>	<i>Siyah İnci</i>	Romance	F	B
17	1		<i>Love Trap</i>	<i>Afli Aşk</i>	Romance	F	B
18	1			<i>Senden Daha Güzel</i>	Romance	F	W
19	1	<i>Daai Crazy Somer</i>	<i>Last Summer</i>	<i>Son Yaz</i>	Mystery	M	B
20	1	<i>Wie Laaste Lag</i>	<i>Love, Reason, Get Even</i>	<i>Aşk Mantık İntikam</i>	Romance	M	C
21	1	<i>Om Elke Draai</i>	<i>Everywhere I go</i>	<i>Her Yerde Sen</i>	Romance	F	W
22	1		<i>Chrysalis</i>	<i>Camdaki Kız</i>	Mystery	F	W
23	1		<i>Resurrection: Ertugrul</i>	<i>Diriliş: Ertuğrul</i>	Historical Drama	O	B
24	1		<i>20 Minutes</i>	<i>20 Dakika</i>	Thriller	O	B
25	1		<i>The Ambassador's Daughter</i>	<i>Sefirin Kızı</i>	Romance	F	W
26	1	<i>Skerpioen</i>		<i>Akrep</i>	Crime	F	C
27	1	<i>Stiletto Vendetta</i>	<i>Stiletto Vendetta</i>	<i>Ufak Tefek Cinayetler</i>	Mystery	F	C
28	1	<i>In die Put</i>	<i>The Pit</i>	<i>Çukur</i>	Crime	F	C
29	1	<i>Wrede Stad</i>	<i>Cruel Istanbul</i>	<i>Zalim İstanbul</i>	Crime	F	C
TOTAL	53				8 Genres	M 7, F 43, O 3	B 13, W 24, C 15

As indicated by Table 2, Generation Z respondents are watching both Afrikaans and English versions of Turkish Television series, with *Dis Complicated* (Sen Çal Kapımı in Turkish) as the most popular Afrikaans series and *Elif* the most popular Turkish TV series in English. According to Smith (2023), *Resurrection: Ertuğrul* (Diriliş: Ertuğrul in Turkish) is currently the most popular Turkish TV series in the world, *Black Money Love* (Kara Para Aşk in Turkish) is the fourth most popular and The Ottoman Empire series is number seven on the world list. Not one of these top three series are currently available in Afrikaans.

Table 2 further illustrates that the 29 Turkish TV series respondents watch can be grouped into eight (8) genres, namely Romance, Family drama, Mysteries, Crime, Thrillers, Medical dramas, Historical Dramas and Historical Action. Of the respondents, females (80.3%) watch most of the series, excluding historical action and thrillers. Males (14.8%) watch Romance, Mystery, Family dramas and Crime, while the gender group Other (4.9%) watch Romance, Thrillers and Historical Action. According to race, 45.9% of the respondents who watch Turkish TV series are White, 31.2% are Coloured and 22.9% are Black. The reason for this analysis of the watching behaviour of respondents (see Figure 2), is to illustrate and understand the analysis of the themes discussed in this study.



Figure 2. Respondents' preferences based on gender and race.

The next three questions asked respondents to indicate if they search for information about Turkish actors online, if they search for information about Türkiye online, and if they, since beginning to watch Turkish TV series, would like to visit Türkiye? Nineteen (19) respondents searched for information about Turkish actors online, eighteen (18) searched for information about Türkiye online and expressed a desire to visit Türkiye. This is a clear indication of the effect of the soft power of Turkish TV series on people, also on the Generation Z group in South Africa.

The respondents watching Turkish TV series, also spend time searching for more information about the actors, the country and various aspects of the culture of Türkiye (see Figure 3). Most of the respondents indicated that they are interested in Turkish music, fashion, clothes, tradition and food, and to a lesser extent in Turkish religion, hospitality, language, art and history. But although watching Turkish TV series stimulates these interests, only eight (8) respondents believe that the Turkish TV series they are watching, portray Türkiye as life in Türkiye really is.

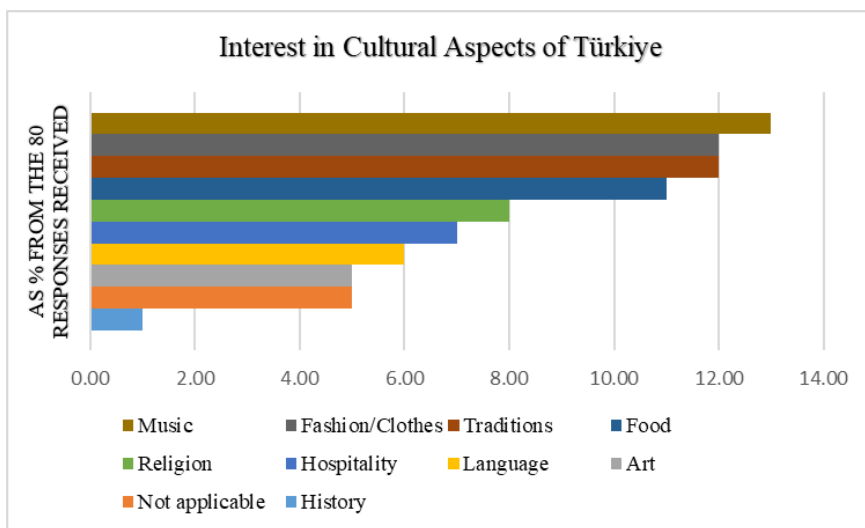


Figure 3. Respondents' interests in Türkiye's culture.

To investigate the perceptions of the respondents about Türkiye as it was before they watched Turkish TV series, how it changed while they watch Turkish TV series, and what their perception about Türkiye currently is – after watching Turkish TV series – respondents were asked to explain to the researcher their answers to the following questions:

- 13. What was your opinion about Türkiye as a country *before* watching Turkish TV series?
- 14. Can you explain how watching Turkish TV series has influenced your perception of Türkiye and its culture?
- 15. What is your overall opinion about Türkiye as a country *after* watching Turkish TV series?

During the interviews with the respondents who are watching Turkish TV series, the researcher realised that some of the respondents repetitively gave the same responses to Questions 14 and 15, and also rephrased their original answers to Question 13 by adding for example phrases like “I did not know that” or “I previously had no idea.” Therefore, the researchers decided to combine the answers of the three questions into one list for the objective of the analysis and to identify themes and sub-themes from these lists of responses as a whole.

The purpose of the data analysis was to establish if the genre of the series and the gender and/or race of respondents played any significant role in the comments from which themes were established. Although most of the respondents were females and therefore most of the data were retrieved from their comments, cross-tabulation showed no significant difference based on either gender or race in the preferences of the respondents in regard to the genre of the series they prefer, or in their opinions regarding Türkiye as a country.

The comments of the nineteen (19) respondents were typed into one document, each comment as a separate entry. This first list contained 53 comments, mostly consisting of one or more sentences each. The next step was to divide the comments into separate sentences, and the sentences into individual statements. For example, one lengthy comment in answer to Question 14 (consisting of five sentences) was:

The biggest part of Turkey [Türkiye] is modern and developed in all areas. They have good universities and schools. Their traditions are still very strong, and most people are conservative in their behaviour. Some men from rural areas still mistreat their wives and believe they must be served by women who don't have an opinion. They love to live together in big houses – all family members – parents, children, grandchildren live together.

This response was divided into the following eight (8) statements:

1. The biggest part of Türkiye is modern and developed in all areas.
2. Türkiye has good universities and schools.
3. Turkish traditions are still very strong.

4. Most Turkish people are conservative in their behaviour.
5. Some Turkish men from rural areas still mistreat their wives.
6. Some Turkish men from rural areas believe they must be served by women.
7. Some Turkish men from rural areas believe women don't have an opinion.
8. Turkish people love to live together in big houses – all family members – parents, children, grandchildren live together.

In this way, the original 53 comments from the 19 respondents delivered 128 statements, each reflecting the respondents' perspectives and impressions of Türkiye. Making use of the analysis capabilities of both Copilot AI and ChatGPT OpenAI, the list with the 128 statements was twice analysed to identify general and repetitive themes. Ten (10) themes were identified and listed. Questions were then posted to ChatGPT regarding each specific theme, followed by the complete list of statements. For example: "Identify statements from the following list reflecting respondent's knowledge of Türkiye." The original lists of statements under each theme thus retrieved were manually examined and only applicable statements for each theme were selected. The short list of selected statements was again evaluated and compared and only five (5) statements, deemed representative of all the other statements reflecting the specific theme, were selected to be included in the ten (10) themes indicated in Table 3.

The next step in the analysis process was to summarize the statements listed under each theme into one general and representative statement reflecting the general opinion derived from all the responses. In this way, the original 53 comments from the 19 respondents reflected the respondents' diverse perspectives and impressions of Türkiye, ranging from no knowledge or limited knowledge at first (Themes 1 to 4), to emerging realizations and shifts in perceptions about Türkiye based on increased exposure to information about the country and its people through watching Turkish Television Series (Themes 4 to 9), and lastly to a need to gain more knowledge about the country and a desire to visit Türkiye in the future (Theme 10).

Table 3. Increased knowledge of, and interest in, Türkiye based on watching Turkish TV Series

Theme 1: General lack of knowledge	Little to no knowledge about, or interest in, Türkiye as a country prior to now
Theme 2: Lack of geographical knowledge	General misconceptions about Türkiye's geography, development level, and place among other countries
Theme 3: Negative perceptions/misconceptions	Stereotypical beliefs about Türkiye's history, political situation, economy, and development
Theme 4: Impressions of Turkish clothes	From limited knowledge about Turkish traditional garments to admiration for the clothes they wear now
Theme 5: Perceptions of Turkish culture	Türkiye cherishes family, traditions, its cultural richness, and diversity while evolving and maintaining its identity
Theme 6: Opinion of the religion in Türkiye	Türkiye has a society characterized by religious devotion alongside openness to other cultures and religions
Theme 7: Impressions of Turkish people	Turkish people are affluent, attractive, kind-hearted, morally upright, caring- also towards animals, and educated
Theme 8: Perspectives of natural scenery	Türkiye is a beautiful country with rivers, seas, mountains, stunning landscapes, amazing visuals and attractive scenery
Theme 9: Opinions of Türkiye in general	Türkiye has modern cities and shops, formal education institutions, a culture of freedom and innovation, and many opportunities
Theme 10: Interest to learn more about Türkiye	I have gained extensive knowledge about Türkiye, its culture, history, religion and social dynamics after watching its TV series

By combining the ten (10) themes into three (3) groups: 1) No knowledge or limited knowledge about Türkiye and its people (themes 1 to 4), 2) Perceptions gained about Türkiye and its people after watching Turkish TV Series (themes 4 to 9), and 3) The need to gain more knowledge about the country and a desire to visit Türkiye in the future (theme 10), a summary of the perceptions was created which clearly answers the third objective of this study, namely to determine if and how the perceptions of Generation Z in South Africa about Türkiye had changed after watching Turkish Television Series.



Figure 4. The perceptions of Generation Z in South Africa about Türkiye after watching Turkish television series.

Figure 4 illustrates that from having little to no knowledge about, or interest in Türkiye, respondents now have a variety of opinions about Turkish traditions, culture, religions, Turkish people and about Türkiye as a country like all other developed countries and a desirable travel destination. For example, while one of the respondents stated that he did not have the slightest knowledge about Türkiye like many others before watching Turkish TV series, he expressed how his perception of the country changed after watching the series as follows:

I did not know anything of Turkey [Türkiye] before my mom start[ed] watching the shows. Now I am also watching them. Then I google Turkey [Türkiye] and I learn that they are not the same as us, but also, they have nice cities and nice places. They have many historical places to visit, and they are religious in their Islam religion.

Similarly, another respondent, who had very negative opinions about Türkiye before watching Turkish TV series, describes his changing views on the country as follows:

I think I like the people. They are good-looking and wear expensive clothes. They are not poor people. I do not know how they feel about foreigners, but I think people can go there and see their towns and cities. I think they have many shops with nice clothes.

The study's most fundamental question finds its answer in the findings presented in Figure 4. Just like the respondents' statements shared above, the perceptions of Generation Z in South Africa toward Türkiye have changed positively after watching Turkish TV series. This also shows that TV series are a highly strategic tool for Türkiye's soft power.

Discussion and conclusion

Turkish TV series have achieved global fame by captivating viewers from the Balkans to Africa, marking a significant milestone as the first productions from a predominantly Muslim country to attain such widespread international appeal. These series have not only infiltrated viewers' lives as powerful mass media outlets, but have also influenced their perceptions, behaviours, and preferences regarding Türkiye and its cultural products. Beyond their entertainment value, Turkish series have significantly bolstered Türkiye's soft power and have aligned seamlessly with the JDP government's foreign policy, particularly in Africa. This study aims to investigate whether similar dynamics are at play among Generation Z in South Africa and to examine the potential relationship between their consumption of Turkish series and their increased positive perceptions of Türkiye and its people. The research will contribute to the broader academic discourse on Türkiye's expanding influence and soft power in Africa.

Semi-structured interviews with respondents from various cities and ethnic groups in South Africa revealed that they watched 29 different Turkish TV series across 12 different platforms. *Dis Complicated*, *Elif*, and *Daai Crazy Somer* (Son Yaz in Turkish) were the most popular shows aired in both Afrikaans and English on numerous platforms. The series in question encompass a variety of genres including romance, family drama, mystery, crime, thriller, medical dramas, historical dramas, and historical action.

The data from the respondents revealed that those who watched the TV series expanded their limited knowledge about Türkiye and developed positive opinions about the country's culture and society. In other words, after watching Turkish TV series, the participants gained a lot of information about Türkiye and started to see it as an important centre of attraction in many respects. One of the respondents emphasizes this situation by stating, "It is a country with an interesting culture, with breathtaking scenery, and very beautiful people." Similarly, another participant expressed her changing views on Türkiye with the expression: "Turkey [Türkiye] is a land with rivers and seas, red rooftops, white walls, and impressive mansions, but also with a rural life with amazing visual sights." From this perspective, it's clear that Generation Z in South Africa greatly appreciates Turkish TV series, and these series have positively shaped their perceptions of Türkiye.

Türkiye is gaining significance as a prominent player in the African continent (Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu & Tepeciklioğlu, 2021). Not just Türkiye's diplomatic actions, but also numerous components of soft power have contributed to the acceleration of this growth. Turkish TV series are highly renowned in this category. This study, similar to the research conducted by Ruiz-Cabrera and Gürkan (2023) in Kenya, Mozambique, and Senegal, confirms that Turkish TV programmes have a role in fostering a favourable image of Türkiye in Africa. In other words, as Berg (2017) states, Turkish TV series function as an important soft power tool for Türkiye.

Overall, it is obvious that the respondents portrayed positive sentiments about Türkiye's culture, beauty, and people, although there are acknowledgments of socioeconomic disparities and ambivalence towards certain aspects. These mixed perceptions reflect the complexity of individuals' experiences and observations after exposure to Turkish TV series. Taking into consideration that 79% of respondents express the desire to visit Türkiye based on what they saw and learned about Türkiye after watching Turkish television series, the study reflects a very positive change in the opinion of respondents regarding Türkiye as a country.

The quantity of scholarly research examining Turkish television series is steadily growing. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of research on the dissemination of Turkish television shows in African nations. Considering the African opening in Turkish foreign policy, conducting more studies on TV series and revealing the effects of TV series on Türkiye's presence on the continent from different perspectives can make significant contributions to the literature.

Endnotes

¹BRICS, an international organisation, takes its name from the acronyms of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. As of 2024, BRICS has grown to nine members, with the inclusion of Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates, making it an important geopolitical bloc.

Ethics Committee Approval: Ethics committee permission for the interviews was obtained from Central University of Technology (CUT), Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa (Resolution number: 23/01/2024/1).

Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained from the participants. Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

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