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# **RESEARCH PAPER**

# Impact of Luxurious Lifestyle Portrayals in Pakistani Dramas on Youth: A Study of Life Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

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# **ABSTRACT**

This research broadly deals with the depiction of glamour in Pakistani dramas and its effect on the contemporary youth. The study employs descriptive and quantitative research methods. The descriptive method analyzes TV dramas, while the quantitative method involves a questionnaire with ten questions designed to assess the impressions of luxurious lifestyle depicted in Pakistani dramas on youth. The questionnaire is adapted from a sample technique presented in William E. Glassman and Marilyn Hadad's book *Approaches to Psychology*. This study contends that Pakistani television dramas face criticism for excessive glamorization, leading the audience into psychological conflicts. This study is significant since it explores the role of Television in shaping and altering attitudes of youth, and concludes that, the select TV dramas potentially disrupt the behavior of young adults. It recommends that these TV dramas can further be analysed under cultural Marxism and identity formation in Postmodernism.

**Keywords:** 

Dayar-e-Dil (The Valley of Heart), Humsafar (Companion), Life Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction, Pakistani Dramas

#### Introduction

Concerns about media communication and its effects have persisted throughout the history of subject (Zia, 2007). Television drama, a globally cherished form of entertainment, draws from various artistic traditions such as theatre, film, and radio. However over time, television drama has developed its own distinctive style (quoted in Zia, 2014, p.1391). According to media theorists, television has played a significant role in shaping a new global culture, influencing aspects like fashion, language, and societal norms. It has become ingrained in the daily lives of people, with public and private discussions often centering on its content (Zia, 2014, p.1390). With the advent of new technologies, television has become even more ubiquitous, reaching Pakistani viewers through cable and satellite dishes (Zia, 2014, p.1390). Numerous studies have shown that television has the power to influence a wide array of attitudes and behaviors among its audience (Zia, 2014, p.1391).

In today's era of scientific and technological advancement, Pakistani citizens have formed a deep attachment to Pakistani dramas, regarding them as the most captivating aspect of their existence (Joshi, 2002, p.19). Pakistani media channels wield influence across various domains such as politics, religion, economy, and education. Media serves as a potent instrument capable of shaping and altering public behaviors and attitudes. Along with these channels, local cable operators keep busy in promoting channels from neighboring countries to promote their business; however, due to lack of surveillance, these channels also contribute to mold public ideologies. Sabir (2012) opines that Television industry of Pakistan produces dramas that are usually centered on the portrayal of glamorous, adventurous and fascinating life that is vague semblance of reality.

This study holds importance as it delved into the depiction of opulent lifestyles showcased in Pakistani dramas, an area that has received limited attention previously. Furthermore, it explored the effect of this glamorous depiction on the life gratification and discontent of young individuals, which remains relatively unexplored. The outcomes of this research could provide valuable insights for Pakistani producers. To achieve this objective, the researchers chose two widely watched dramas among youth, namely Dayar-e-Dil and Humsafar, with the study population consisting of individuals aged between eighteen and twenty-two. The rationale behind choosing respondents aged eighteen to twenty-two is rooted in their keen interest in dramas, which significantly influences them. Their on-screen experiences have a considerable impact on their levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with real-life situations. Additionally, given that youth make up approximately thirty-two percent of Pakistan's population, various researchers offer diverse interpretations of their perspectives and outlook. The majority of young individuals are profoundly influenced by the content they consume on screen.

Considering the criteria for material sampling, the study is grounded on the following principles: to explore how Pakistani dramas endorse a lavish lifestyle, to scrutinize the instigation of aspirations for wealth and influence among Pakistani youth through the portrayal of aristocratic lifestyles in dramas, and to assess the perception of everyday life as mundane by Pakistani youth after exposure to extraordinary lifestyles depicted on television screens. The study examines the following questions: How the Pakistani dramas promote a posh way of life? How do Pakistani dramas contribute to the cultivation of aspirations for wealth and influence among the youth, particularly students, through their portrayal of opulent existences? How does Pakistani youth begin to recognize its day to day life as dull after watching an extra ordinary life style full of adventures on the television screens?

#### **Literature Review**

Previous researches conducted in this field mainly focused to investigate the effects of satellite channels on the attitude of its Pakistani viewers (Fatima, 2000), the impact of Star Plus dramas broadcasted nightly on their audience. (Shahbaz, 2004), impact of cable television on Pakistani women (Zia, 2007), the infiltration of Indian cultural influence via films (Saleem, 2004), satellite channel and societal change in Pakistan (Ali, 2001). Some of these researches have indirectly mentioned the glamour and luxurious lifestyle portrayed in these dramas. This research would extensively deal with the portrayal of glamour in Pakistani dramas and its effects on the regular young audience.

Ali (2001) undertook research examining the influence of cable channels on the inhabitants of Lahore and concluded that these channels are changing the preferences of people regarding language, food, dressing, architecture etc. Similarly, Saleem (1994) was concerned with the study of cultural imperialism through dish antenna in the Pakistani society where he concluded that television alters the socio-religious beliefs of people. A very small percentage of the previous researches were actually concerned with the threats that are posed by the Pakistani dramas themselves on their audience. They adopted an attitude of critique for the foreign channels but totally ignored their own television industry. This present study dealt with the threats posed on the television viewers by the glamorous lifestyle depicted in Pakistani dramas themselves.

The main objective of the present study is to investigate the portrayal of a lavish lifestyle in Pakistani dramas. The focus is on determining whether such portrayals instill aspirations for wealth and influence among young viewers and whether they aspire to emulate the adventurous lifestyles depicted in these dramas. The research delves into this phenomenon by combining two psychological frameworks: Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory and Carl Rogers' self-actualization theory. It establishes a link between them, examining how the depiction of glamorous lifestyles in dramas impacts the youth.

The study employs two reliable research methods: descriptive and quantitative. The descriptive method will analyze TV dramas, while the quantitative method involves a questionnaire with 10 questions designed to assess the impact of deluxe way of life depicted in Pakistani dramas on youth. The questionnaire is adapted from a sample technique introduced in William E. Glassman and Marilyn Hadad's *Approaches to Psychology*.

# Methodology

The study employs two robust research methodologies: descriptive and quantitative. Former is utilized to examine the portrayal of luxurious lifestyles in dramas, while the latter is employed to investigate the effect of such portrayals on the life gratification and life discontent of youth. Data for the study is sourced from two popular dramas, namely Dayar-e-Dil and Humsafar, chosen for their widespread popularity. Television serves as the chosen medium due to its extensive reach among youth, enabling it to influence their attitudes and behaviors. The study population comprises students from Government College Jhelum, selected because they are in a formative stage of life and are particularly susceptible to the influence of on-screen content. The research sample consists of sixteen students from Government College Jhelum. Questionnaires serve as the primary research instrument, adapted from a sample provided by William E. Glassman and Marilyn Hadad. These are distributed random students, and the findings are presented through graphical representations such as graphs and pie charts.

# Theoretical Model of Cognitive Dissonance and Self-Actualization

The primary objective of the study is to analyze the effects of the affluent lifestyles portrayed in Pakistani dramas on Pakistani youth. Specifically, the research will investigate whether such depictions foster discontentment with their own lives among young individuals or inspire them to strive for and attain similar living standards. To embark on this objective, the study will integrate Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance and Carl Rogers' self-actualization theory. Leon Festinger introduced the theory of cognitive dissonance in 1962 through his work "Theory of Cognitive Dissonance". Cognitive dissonance arises when conflicting attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors are present, resulting in a sense of discomfort that prompts adjustments to alleviate this discomfort and restore equilibrium. Festinger's (1962) theory posits that individuals possess an inherent drive to maintain consistency among their attitudes and beliefs, striving to avoid discordance or dissonance, known as the principle of cognitive consistency. Dissonance theorists emphasize that individuals exert significant effort to alleviate dissonance. In this study, cognitive dissonance theory has been employed to explore whether young people aspire to emulate the lifestyles depicted on television and whether this aspiration engenders displeasure with their everyday lives. Additionally, this aspect of the theory aids in understanding whether youth consider their daily routines as ordinary and yearn for the adventurous lives portrayed in dramas.

Extensive research has explored the theory of cognitive dissonance across various contexts, aiming to refine its core concepts and identify key factors influencing attitude change. This research is typically categorized into three primary domains: forced compliance behavior, decision-making processes, and exertion of effort. The current study specifically focuses on forced compliance behavior, which arises when individuals are compelled to engage in actions contrary to their desires, leading to cognitive dissonance between their beliefs and actions. Forced compliance occurs when individuals perform actions inconsistent with their personal convictions. This aspect of the theory will assist in examining whether young individuals aspire to attain the same levels of power, fame, and wealth as their admired characters, and whether they experience dissatisfaction with their current lives due to the portrayal of these characters.

The study have integrated Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance with Carl Rogers' theory of self-actualization. This connection will focus on the juxtaposition of forced compliance within cognitive dissonance and the notion of incongruence introduced by Carl Rogers in his self-actualization theory recognized in the 1960s. According to Rogers' theory, individuals have the potential to achieve their life goals, desires, and aspirations, with the attainment of these leading to self-actualization. This concept stands as one of Rogers' significant contributions to psychology, emphasizing that various factors must align for individuals to realize their full potential (Rogers, 2004). Rogers posited that each person is unique and inherently inclined towards positive growth and creativity, manifesting destructive behaviors only when hindered by a negative self-concept or external constraints. Central to Rogers' perspective is the notion that self-actualization occurs when an individual's "ideal self" aligns with their actual behavior, representing a state of congruence. This alignment enables individuals to fulfill their potential. By exploring this connection, I aim to assess the extent of dissatisfaction and the level of desire for fame and power among the viewers of these dramas.

#### **Results and Discussion**

# Manipulating the Minds of Youth through Unregulated Social Media

Mass media functions as a conduit for disseminating information to the public, conveyed in various formats and mediums (Zia, 2014, p.1). Technological advancements have transformed the landscape of mass media, turning it into a global source of entertainment catering to diverse audiences (Karim et al., 2016, p.42). Over the past fifteen years, mass media has played a pivotal role in bolstering the economies of nations, contributing to connectivity and supporting various sectors of development (Shahbaz, 2004, p.2). The pervasive influence of mass media, particularly television, shapes societal values and norms, making it an integral aspect of contemporary culture (Zia, 2014, p.1390).

Television consistently emerges as the primary medium among various forms of mass media, predominantly due to its capacity to swiftly and directly influence the general populace (Joshi, 2002, p.19). Serving as a primary source of entertainment, television offers a diverse array of programming formats, including game shows, morning programs, informational broadcasts, and dramas. Dramatic productions are ubiquitous across television channels worldwide and are recognized for their effectiveness in both entertaining and influencing audiences (Madni, Hassan, Aziz & Amin, 2014, p.173).

The significance of television in influencing audiences cannot be overlooked (Zia, 2014, p.1390). Current data indicates that nearly 99 percent of Pakistan's population has television access (Hijazi, 2003). Previously, Pakistan's television industry was limited to a single channel, but the introduction of cable networks has transformed the drama landscape (Zia, 2014, p.1390). Today, cable network viewership in Pakistan extends beyond the upper middle class to include the middle and lower classes, granting access to a diverse range of programs (Zia, 2007, p.1). This rapid expansion of cable networks can be attributed to their ability to cater specifically to the public's entertainment needs (Zia, 2003, p.1). According to Wilson, television possesses the capability to influence the attitudes and potential of its viewers (as cited in Karim et al. 2016).

Television made its debut in Pakistan back in 1964, initially with just one channel known as Pakistan Television or PTV, considered the national channel (Zia, 2014, p.1390). The introduction of cable TV and dish antennas brought forth a plethora of channels, now accessible to approximately 55 percent of Pakistan's population (Zia, 2014, p.1390). Pakistani media, characterized by its vibrancy and dynamism, has emerged as a potent force in shaping public perspectives, with the content displayed on television screens significantly influencing audience perceptions (Khan, et.al, 2013, p.6). Media channels in Pakistan wield influence across various aspects of life, spanning politics, religion, economy, and education,

serving as a powerful instrument capable of manipulating public behaviors and attitudes (Sabir, 2012). The proliferation of private television channels in Pakistan, largely unregulated by the government, has given rise to concerns about their potential to sway public opinion unchecked (Sabir, 2011). The lack of proper regulation within the Pakistani television industry has fostered an environment where channels can freely broadcast content, often with detrimental societal effects (Shafiq, 1995, p.7). One such consequence is the idealization of body shapes portrayed in media, which compels women in Pakistani society to pursue unrealistic standards, putting their health at risk (Khan, et.al, 2013, p.7). The glamor depicted in dramas encompasses various facets, from idealized body shapes to aspirational lifestyles, exerting a significant influence on the younger demographic of drama viewers in Pakistan.

Approximately 32% of Pakistan's population comprises youth aged 15-29, with differing interpretations regarding their orientation, outlook, and worldview. A significant portion of students, both in universities and colleges, have access to television, with many preferring it for entertainment purposes (Zia, 2007, p.10). However, the lifestyles depicted in most Pakistani dramas can lead youth into a realm of idealism (Zia, 2014, p.1393), as television serves as a medium that transports audiences into a world of fantasy. Pakistani youth often turn to television dramas to escape their everyday lives (Zia, 2014, p.1394). These dramas fuel desires and aspirations that are challenging to fulfill in reality, primarily due to the portrayal of glamorous lifestyles on screen. Consequently, when youth realize that their dreams are unattainable, it breeds frustration within them (Zia, 2014, p.1394).

The portrayal of dramas across various channels negatively impacts the youth, instilling desires, cravings, and idealistic notions among Pakistani adolescents (Shahbaz, 2004). Pakistani television dramas face criticism for excessive glamorization, leading the audience into psychological conflicts. Television plays a significant role in shaping and altering the attitudes of youth, potentially disrupting their behavior (Rahim, 1994).

#### Dayar-e-Dil (The Valley of Heart)

The drama Dayar-e-Dil was chosen for examination due to its categorization among dramas that promote opulent and daring lifestyles. "Luxurious," "adventurous," and "lifestyle" are terms laden with subjective judgment. In this study, "luxury" denotes items or experiences deemed nonessential yet desirable, often costly or challenging to obtain. The analysis focused on the characters' attire, environment, and financial status within settings featuring luxurious elements. "Adventure" is defined as a thrilling and extraordinary encounter, while "lifestyle" refers to an individual's way of living. Given the research's focus on portraying opulent lifestyles, the investigation delved into the portrayal of luxury, adventure, and lifestyle in this drama, assessing their impact on the typical young audience.

Dayar-e-dil follows the tale of three khans: patriarch Bakhtiyar Khan and his sons Behroz Bakhtiyar Khan and Arjumand Bakhtiyar Khan. Set against the stunning backdrop of Skardu, the drama unfolds within the grandeur of a palatial mansion adorned with opulent furnishings. Each central character enjoys a spacious and luxurious room, offering panoramic views of nature through their windows. Their lives are characterized by contentment, surrounded by a retinue of servants poised to fulfill their every command. Indulging in sumptuous meals thrice daily, the characters engage in lavish pursuits such as hunting and horseback riding. Their attire is equally extravagant, with the khans and subsequent generation, including Wali and Farah, donning lavish ensembles, often featuring branded Western wear.

# Humsafar (Companion)

Humsafar depicted the narrative of a young duo, Ashar and Khirad, with Ashar being a prominent business magnate residing in an expansive estate, attended to by a multitude

of servants. He possessed opulent vehicles and maintained a consistently immaculate appearance. His residence, a grand mansion, boasted amenities including a nursery, swimming pool, and sprawling lawn. Khirad, too, exuded elegance in her attire, adorned with dazzling jewels. The supporting cast was similarly portrayed living lives replete with luxury. Ashar's aunt and cousin inhabited a lavish villa nestled within an upscale neighborhood.

# **Analysis of Survey Questions**

The subsequent phase of the examination involved assessing the influence of the opulent lifestyles portrayed in dramas on the youth's sense of contentment or discontentment. Surveys containing ten inquiries were distributed to students at Government College Jhelum using random sampling methods. The queries pertained to the second research inquiry, which aims to explore the cultivation of desire of being rich and powerful among Pakistani youth due to the portrayal of deluxe lives in dramas. One such question is:

1) Pakistani dramas are: Depressing, sloppy, romantic, and lavish

A large percentage expressed a preference for Pakistani dramas being perceived as more gloomy and disorganized (78%) rather than romantic and extravagant (22%). As per Zia (2014, 2007), a significant portion of university and college students watch T.V. Primarily, the youth entertains itself through television programs; however, the lifestyles depicted in many Pakistani dramas can potentially lead the youth towards an idealized vision of life since when opposing thoughts, convictions, or actions coexist, it create a feeling of unease, leading to changes aimed at reducing this unease and achieving balance (Festinger, 1962). The reason behind this refutation is the themes of current Pakistani dramas which revolve around women oppression and family politics.

2) A good character is the one who shows: Power, kind-heartedness, self-dignity, and fame

There was a varied response among students regarding this query. The majority of students favored self-respect and recognition (63%), while a portion also emphasized kindness and authority (36%). According to Zia (2007), the youth primarily favors television for entertainment purposes. The current finding refutes his point as the youth preferred moral characters which would not be preferred if youth considered television just as a source of entertainment. The finding stressed as Roger claims that every individual is distinct and naturally driven towards positive development and innovation, exhibiting harmful actions solely when obstructed by a poor self-image or outside limitations (Roger, 1960). The reason behind this is that most of the present dramas show self-righteous and dignified people as victorious towards the end.

3) Your favorite drama is: Dayar-e-Dil, Humsafar

Most of the students preferred *Humsafar* (57%) over *Dayar-e-Dil* (43%)

4) Best thing about Khirad was her: Innocence, beauty, dresses, or strength of character

Students exhibited a diverse range of opinions regarding this question. Approximately half of the students emphasized the importance of moral integrity over attire (50%), while the remaining half prioritized beauty and purity (50%). According to Zia (2014), the portrayal of lifestyles in many Pakistani dramas can steer youth towards an idealistic notion of perfection. The point goes in accordance with this concept because the almost all of the

respondents were impressed by beauty and dressing of the character which demonstrates their implicit desire of possessing the same things. These individuals thus exhibited a 'forced compliance behavior' (Festinger, 1962) which occurs when people are forced to perform activities against their wishes, resulting in a conflict between their beliefs and behaviors, known as cognitive dissonance.

5) Standout value about Faraah's character was her: Boldness, dressing sense, selfesteem, or outgoing lifestyle

Regarding this question, the majority of students prioritized the self-respect of the character, yet they also appeared to be drawn to her adventurous lifestyle, which ranked second (56%), while other students found inspiration in her confidence and fashion sense (44%). Zia (2014) suggests that television serves as a platform that propels viewers into a realm of imagination. The response of this question shows that most of the respondents preferred self-esteem over other traits, so the dramas did not push them in the world of fantasy regarding this. Hence, every individual is distinct and naturally predisposed to positive development (Roger, 1960). The reason of this is also that towards the end moral traits make a character successful in the present dramas.

6) Wali and Asher gained popularity because of their: Social status, face cuts, authoritative tone, or will power

Majority gave priority to show of authority and resolution (54%) while other students preferred physical appearance and social class (46%). Here, the respondents preferred moral traits too for the same reason as mentioned above.

The inquiries pertaining to the exploration of the third research question, which involves analyzing the perception of everyday life as dull among Pakistani youth after being exposed to extraordinary adventures depicted on screen, are outlined below:

# 7) A quality drama is defined by its: Storyline, setting, or actors

Nearly all students favored the storyline, yet the majority showed a preference for the setting following the storyline (57%), while a portion favored the lifestyle following the storyline (43%). Zia (201) states that Pakistani youth turns to television dramas as way of gaining escape from their real life. The response to this question indirectly shows that the respondents are inspired by the scenery of these plays such as big mansions and locations. It shows their boredom and dissatisfaction from their routine life, thus leading to 'cognitive dissonance' which occurs when opposing attitudes, convictions, or actions exist, causing a feeling of unease (Festinger, 1962).

8) The best bit of drama was its: Story, scenery, lifestyle, or characters

All the students favored the narrative, yet a significant portion (63%) chose the scenery as their second preference, whereas a few opted for the lifestyle aspect (37%). Zia (2014) states that Pakistani youth turns to television dramas as way of gaining an escape from their real life. The response to this question indirectly shows that respondents are inspired by the setting of these plays such as big mansions and location which shows heir boredom and dissatisfaction from their routine life.

9) What did you find most appealing about the setting in these plays? Landscape, dresses, or lavish houses

Every participant in the study found inspiration in the settings of the plays, with the majority favoring luxurious residences as their second choice (63%), while others favored clothing (37%). According to Zia (2014), television dramas evoke desires and aspirations that are often challenging to achieve in reality, attributed to the depiction of splendid lifestyles on television screens. The responses to this question align with this notion, as all participants were inspired by the sceneries of the plays, indicating their dissatisfaction with their everyday lives. Hence, the audience faces a struggle where their desire for an ideal life is in constant conflict with their reality, thus, leading these individuals far from 'self-actualization' (Roger 1960) and towards cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1962).

10) Life portrayed in these dramas is: Fantasy based and imaginary, ideal and perfect, adventurous, or a fulfilled life one can achieve by hard work?

The majority of students viewed the life depicted in dramas as ideal and filled with adventure (56%), while others perceived it as fictional yet fulfilling (44%). Zia (2014) additionally notes that young individuals aspire to the extravagant lifestyle portrayed in these dramas, but when they realize that their dreams and desires are unattainable, it generates a sense of frustration within them. Furthermore, the response to the final question indicates that the majority of respondents perceive the lives depicted in dramas as ideal, flawless, and adventurous, reflecting their implicit longing to lead similar lifestyles.

#### **Conclusions**

The analysis of the questionnaire revealed diverse responses from the youth regarding the television content. While a majority of respondents perceive Pakistani dramas as disheartening, they also acknowledge them as depicting an ideal and flawless life, indicative of their longing for a similar lifestyle. Additionally, a considerable number of respondents view Pakistani dramas as romantic and fabulous. Similarly, participants value self-respect, self-confidence, and demonstrations of authority as admirable qualities in their preferred characters. This indicates that instead of seeking to imitate the lives of drama characters, they derive satisfaction from their own lives and strive to cultivate self-respect, self-confidence, and leadership qualities. Many respondents favor the settings, landscapes, and scenery depicted in these dramas, while also acknowledging the adventurous nature of the portrayed life, reflecting their desire to lead a similar life as depicted on screen.

The second inquiry focused on probing whether the portrayal of an affluent lifestyle in dramas fosters a longing for wealth and authority among Pakistani youth. Six questions within the questionnaire were dedicated to exploring this aspect. Analysis of respondents' responses revealed that the majority perceive Pakistani dramas as disheartening and lackluster. It was observed that these dramas instigate a sense of dissatisfaction among youth by instilling aspirations for wealth and authority, as they perceive the depicted life as ideal and flawless compared to their own daily existence. However, a substantial percentage of students also view these dramas as fictional. When asked about the most admirable trait of their favorite characters, respondents predominantly favored moral attributes such as self-dignity and self-esteem over materialistic traits. This suggests contentment with their own lives and a lack of desire to acquire the power and riches depicted in the dramas.

The third inquiry aimed to assess how Pakistani youth perceive their everyday lives as mundane after witnessing an extraordinary lifestyle filled with adventures on television screens. Four questions within the questionnaire were designated to investigate this aspect. Analysis revealed that a majority of respondents found inspiration in the landscapes, scenery, and settings depicted in these dramas, prioritizing these elements over the actors. Furthermore, most respondents viewed the dramas as adventurous, suggesting a desire to

escape from the monotony of their real lives and aspire to lead lives akin to those portrayed in the dramas.

The present research recommends the Pakistani producers and screen writers to diversify the depiction of lifestyles in TV dramas. Since opulent lifestyle can be motivating, it should have a realistic balance that represents the complexities and challenges of such lives. This approach will present a more nuanced understanding of the reality over idealizing wealth, agency and authority.

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