

LIFESTYLE VLOGS ON YOUTUBE: INVESTIGATING GEN-Z GRATIFICATIONS
AND ITS IMPACT ON THEIR MENTAL WELL-BEING IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This study explores the consumption of lifestyle vlogs on YouTube among Gen-Z audiences in Pakistan, examining the gratifications they seek and the impact of prolonged exposure on their mental well-being. Grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Cultivation Theory, the research identifies entertainment, escapism, inspiration, and social connection as key motivations driving viewership. While these vlogs fulfill emotional and recreational needs, their idealized portrayal of luxury and perfection fosters adverse outcomes such as social comparison, FOMO (fear of missing out), financial stress, and a distorted perception of reality. The qualitative analysis, based on in-depth interviews, reveals that excessive consumption disrupts routines and perpetuates materialistic desires, particularly among impressionable audiences. This study emphasizes the need for ethical content creation, media literacy, and moderated consumption to mitigate negative effects. The findings contribute to understanding the complex relationship between digital media consumption, audience gratifications, and psychological well-being, providing guidance for content creators, educators, and policymakers.

Keywords: Lifestyle vlogs, YouTube, Gen-Z, gratifications, mental well-being, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Cultivation Theory, social comparison, FOMO, Pakistan, digital media consumption.

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INTRODUCTION

YouTube is the leading streaming platform globally, the second-largest search engine, and a central hub for numerous social media communities (Rotman & Preece, 2010). Since its launch in 2005, it has served as a space for social interaction, information exchange, news, and entertainment for a wide-ranging international audience. Over the years, the platform has expanded its offerings to include various types of content such as vlogs, original short videos, and educational resources. According to a recent report, YouTube now reaches 2.6 billion active users per month across more than 100 countries, with 720,000 hours of video uploaded daily and over one billion hours of content watched every day (Mohsin, 2021). The majority of this viewing occurs on mobile devices, with additional access through computers and smart TVs, highlighting YouTube's prominent role in everyday life.

A key reason for YouTube's popularity is its advanced recommendation system, driven by complex algorithms, filters content on the homepage and through suggested videos to deliver highly relevant recommendations based on users' viewing patterns (Ricci et al., 2021).

THE EVOLUTION AND INFLUENCE OF YOUTUBE IN DIGITAL MEDIA

YouTube is the world's most popular streaming platform and the second-largest search engine, boasting 2.6 billion monthly active users across over 100 countries. Daily, more than 720,000 hours of video are uploaded, and over one billion hours of video content are watched (Rotman & Preece, 2010). Viewers access YouTube through various devices, with a significant share on mobile. The platform serves diverse purposes, including entertainment, information sharing, and social utility, while its health-related videos are increasingly used for accessible mental health resources and leisure (Park & Goering, 2016).

Over the past decade, the online world has gone through a major transformation. The growth of social media has allowed young people to quickly share ideas, emotions, personal information, images, and videos. In today's digital age, young people are increasingly looking to vloggers for information, entertainment, and inspiration (Sharma & Singh, 2024). With the rise of platforms like YouTube and TikTok, vloggers have become incredibly popular and are now important sources of content for young people (Rubin, 2009). Many influencers create content similar to television shows, producing moderately long videos on a regular schedule that often focus on short-lived topics. This practice allows viewers to either follow content regularly or occasionally search for videos to meet specific gratification needs (Thelwall, 2021). Their videos cover a wide range of topics, including lifestyle, fashion, beauty, travel, technology, and social issues, among others. By creating and sharing content across various platforms, vloggers significantly influence a large segment of the younger generation (Fouhey et al., 2018). Lifestyle Vlogs, or video bloggers, are individuals who produce and share videos showcasing their daily lives, experiences, opinions, and knowledge on a variety of topics (Kanwal et al., 2023).

Generation Z, also known as "Gen-Z" are the people born between 1997 and 2012, it is a demographic group that has grown up during the rise of social media. This generation has been exposed to social media from an early age, making it a big part of their daily lives. Being digital natives has influenced their media habits, especially their preference for video content and interactive platforms (Sharma & Singh, 2024). To understand why Gen-Z is drawn to platforms like YouTube, it's useful to apply The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) which examines the social and psychological motivations behind individuals' media use, focusing on how people actively select media to fulfill specific needs (Katz et al., 1973; Cheung et al., 2011; Gan & Wang, 2015). UGT is widely recognized for effectively addressing

the “how” and “why” of media use, highlighting how individuals choose media channels in a goal-oriented way to satisfy their gratification needs such as information-seeking, entertainment, social interaction, self-identity, and escapism (LaRose et al., 2004; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Lee & Ma, 2012; O’Carroll & Rooney, 2020). However, this widespread use has also raised concerns about the impact of social media activity on their mood and mental well-being.

In this context, analyzing the causes behind Gen Z's consumption of lifestyle vlogs is critical. These vlogs are not only entertaining, but they also influence young people's perceptions and mindsets, which can have a significant impact on their psychological well-being. Our objective in conducting this research is to further comprehend the complex relationship between content consumption and its negative effects on the mental well-being of Pakistani youth.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The rising trend of lifestyle vlogs in Pakistan has transformed the way Gen-Z consumes media and interacts with online content. Research by Sharma and Singh (2024) indicates that social media addiction negatively impacts young adults' mental health. Furthermore, the study revealed that those having social media habits had higher levels of depression and anxiety than those with no such addictions. There is a lack of comprehensive research exploring the specific gratification needs of a viewer fulfilled by vloggers and how Gen-Z is engaged, gratified and influenced by it. Research suggests that frequent exposure to specific lifestyles depicted in vlogs can lead to the development of unrealistic attitudes among impressionable youth audiences (Kanwal et al., 2023).

While these vlogs offer entertainment, inspiration, escapism, validation and social connection, they may also develop unrealistic expectations, which cause viewers to be dissatisfied with their own lives; social comparison, where viewers judge themselves against the idealized lifestyles portrayed; and body image issues and beauty standards, where viewers may feel under pressure to meet particular physical and beauty standards. Constant exposure to these idealized portrayals can lead to increased stress and anxiety, while unfulfilled expectations can cause depression and bad mood. Fear of missing out (FOMO) can also intensify feelings of inadequacy. Viewers may experience identity and self-perception problems as they try to match their real lives with the media they consume. Furthermore, apathy lack of motivation and interest can result from the distraction of vlogs, leading to unproductive behaviours and laziness. Cognitive dissonance may arise when the content consumed contradicts personal values. Additionally, although lifestyle vlogs can create a sense of social connection, viewers may still experience feelings of isolation, as the relationships shown are often scripted and do not reflect genuine, real-life interactions.

In the context of Pakistan, where societal pressures and cultural expectations are significant. Understanding these dynamics is essential to inform content producers and mental health advocates. Moreover, the lack of critical media literacy skills among young people and prolonged consumption of such content needs to be addressed to reduce the detrimental effects and promote healthier media consumption habits among Gen-Z.

RATIONALE

The importance of this research lies in its ability to uncover how lifestyle vlogs on YouTube impact the mental well-being of Gen-Z in Pakistan, contributing to issues such as unrealistic expectations, social comparison, body image concerns, beauty standards, FOMO, Cognitive dissonance, Materialistic values leading to financial stress and

dissatisfaction, anxiety and depression. Being digital natives, Gen-Z is especially susceptible to the content they consume online, which may impact how they perceive happiness, success, and self-worth. By understanding these effects, the study can emphasize the need for responsible content creation, balanced media consumption, and positive mental health practices. It aims to create awareness and promote media literacy among young viewers helping them understand the mental health implications of their work and the responsibility they bear in shaping the well-being of their audiences. Additionally, this study will offer guidance to educators, parents, and policymakers, assisting them in developing strategies to reduce the negative effects of digital media and ensure healthier online engagement.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To explore the gratification needs of Gen-Z in Pakistan fulfilled through the consumption of lifestyle vlogs on YouTube, using the Uses and Gratifications theory.
- 2) To assess how the portrayal of idealized lifestyles in vlogs influences Gen-Z's perception of reality, using Cultivation theory.
- 3) To investigate the negative impacts of lifestyle vlogs on the mental well-being of Gen-Z in Pakistan, focusing on issues such as depression, social comparison, body image concerns, and unrealistic expectations etc.
- 4) To identify strategies and recommendations for content creators, educators, and policymakers to alleviate the negative mental health effects of lifestyle vlogs and promote responsible media consumption among Gen-Z in Pakistan.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

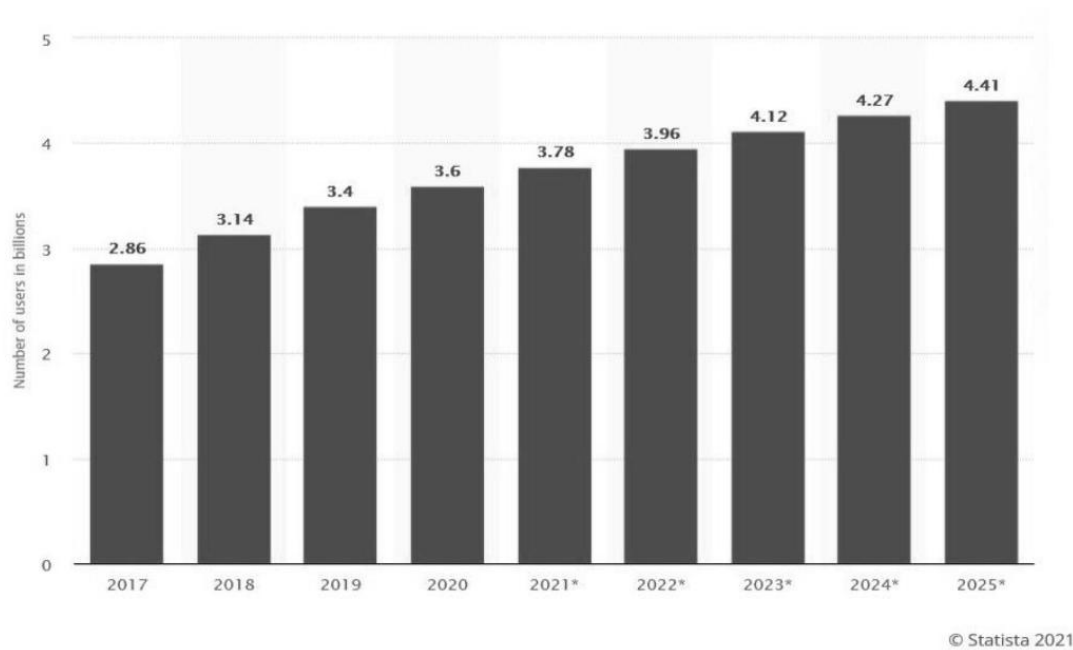
- 1) What specific gratifications does Gen-Z in Pakistan seek from lifestyle vlogs on YouTube?
- 2) How do these gratifications influence their media consumption behaviour?
- 3) What are the potential positive and negative impacts of lifestyle vlogs?
- 4) How does prolonged exposure to idealized lifestyles contribute to an increased risk of mental health issues among Gen-Z in Pakistan?
- 5) What strategies can content creators and policymakers implement to mitigate the negative mental health impacts of lifestyle vlogs on Gen-Z viewers in Pakistan?

LITERATURE REVIEW

SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The emergence of the internet has changed how people communicate and consume media. Social media is now a platform that is used by both individuals and organizations extensively (Balčytienė, 2020). More than 3.6 billion people used social media globally in 2020, and by 2025, that number is expected to increase over 4.41 billion (Statista, 2021; see Figure 1). The rise of user-generated content during the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 allowed people to create and share content on platforms such as YouTube (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Web 2.0 has made social media a crucial component of modern society since it provides dynamic, interactive spaces for users to upload and engage with content (Murugesan, 2007). As a result of this change, YouTube has become one of the most popular platforms for lifestyle vlogs, enabling creators to record and share various aspects of their lives (Hosch, 2021).

FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF SOCIAL NETWORK USERS WORLDWIDE FROM 2017 TO 2025 (IN BILLIONS)



(STATISTA, 2021)

SOCIAL MEDIA ENTERTAINMENT AND MONETIZATION PLATFORM

Over time, YouTube has evolved from a straightforward video-sharing site to a significant player in the media entertainment industry, creating opportunities for content creators to monetize their work through advertisements and sponsorships (Van Dijck, 2013). This transformation has led to the rise of "social media entertainment," where amateur creators professionalize their content and build global fan base. Over 2.5 million YouTube creators receive some form of financial benefits, all they require to get monetized is 4000 watch hours in 12 months and a minimum of 1000 subscribers (Talukdar, 2020). There are more than 2,000 channels boasting one million or more subscribers (Cunningham & Craig, 2017).

PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING ON YOUTUBE

Moreover, YouTube gives users more control over their content and promotes a sense of community by enabling participation features like liking, commenting, and submitting videos (Khan, 2017). However, only a small percentage of users actively create content, which is a crucial participatory act in YouTube's social media dynamics (Shao, 2009, as cited in Khan, 2017).

INTRODUCTION TO VLOGGING AND ITS TERMINOLOGY

YouTube is one of the most popular video sharing networks today. It appeals to a fairly broad audience due to the various features that have been added in recent years. Currently, "more than 2 billion logged-in users visit YouTube each month, and a billion hours of video are viewed daily, generating billions of views" (YouTube, 2021). When it comes to vlogs, the term "vlog" is derived from the combination of the words "blog" and "video." Therefore, the term "vlogger" is derived from the combination of the words "video" and "blogger" (as "Vlogger" or "YouTuber"). Biel and Perez (2010) stated, "Vlogs are video collections that serve as both an audiovisual life documentary and a medium for communication and interaction on the Internet". "Vlogging is not exclusive to YouTube, but one of the main characteristics that set it apart from other online video repositories is the social interaction it encourages, which turns YouTube into a platform for video-related content

and engagement.”

THE RISE OF VLOGGING IN PAKISTAN

Vlogging in Pakistan gained momentum after 2015, facilitated by improved internet infrastructure and greater accessibility to high-speed connectivity. When video sharing websites like Youtube began to give content creators revenue possibilities in late 2016 or early 2017, Vlogging became popular in Pakistan. Early Pakistani vloggers followed the patterns of international influencers but faced challenges due to cultural norms and taboos around self-presentation and content themes (Choe, 2024). Over the years, vloggers have become so popular that some of them have surpassed celebrities or TV or film stars.

THE IMPACT OF VLOGGERS ON PAKISTANI YOUTH

Approximately 75% of Pakistani youth aged 12–24 actively engage with social media, with nearly half prioritizing video consumption as their primary online activity. The increasing exposure to both international and local lifestyle vloggers has significantly influenced the values and aspirations of this demographic, aligning them more closely with the lifestyles portrayed online and causing an obsession among them (Niu & Palm Reed, 2023). Vloggers not only introduce new trends but also challenge traditional norms, thereby contributing to the evolution of cultural narratives. While this influence promotes creativity and global connectivity, it also raises concerns about the shifting identities and values of young audiences. (Vlahović, Ercegovic & Tankosić, 2023).

LIFESTYLE VLOGS ON YOUTUBE

Lifestyle information, including topics like healthy eating, exercising, and personal appearance, has traditionally been sourced from lifestyle magazines, television, and radio shows. However, social media influencers have become a well-known and reliable source of lifestyle information, sharing their perspectives combining personal storytelling with entertainment on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Users can interact with lifestyle content that is created according to their individual interests (Thelwall, 2021). The key categories of lifestyle vlogs, including fitness, beauty, family, lifestyle, and travel, with common themes across all categories:

- **FITNESS VLOGS:** These vlogs emphasize body perfection, aligning with Baudrillard's (2017) view of the body as both a capital and a fetish object.
- **BEAUTY VLOGS:** Promote products and self-care routines, reflecting long-standing societal beauty standards (Black, 2004).
- **FAMILY VLOGS:** They get paid for showing the internet their daily activities with their families such as going on vacations, family gatherings or celebrations, playing with their kids, presenting a harmonious and cheerful family life (Sheikh et al., 2022; Talukdar, 2020).
- **LIFESTYLE VLOGS:** Depict leisure activities, luxury lifestyles, and charitable acts, often combining entertainment with consumerist messaging.

The lifestyle category on YouTube is very competitive because brand endorsements and sponsored reviews bring in huge amount of money. Influencers need to be technically proficient, innovative, and visually appealing in order to attract and expand their following (Bishop, 2019; Riboni, 2017). Gen-Z, being the most frequent viewers of lifestyle vlogs, serves as a prime target for influencers seeking to maximize their revenue by offering audience-specific content that provides entertainment, inspiration, escapism, and relatability.

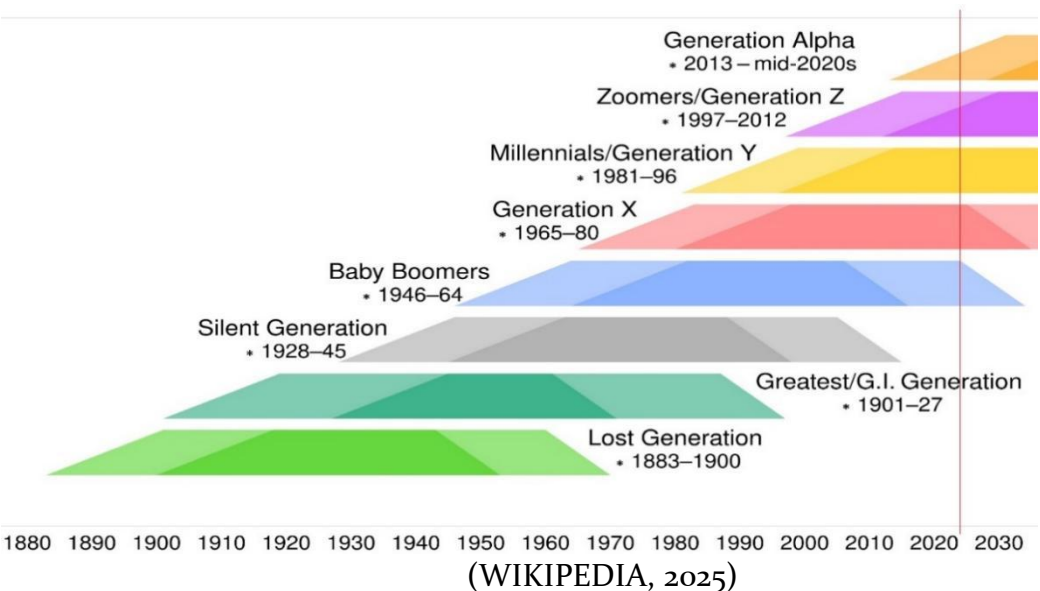
INTRODUCTION TO GENERATION-Z

Generation Z (commonly referred to as Gen Z or Zoomers) is the demographic group that

follows Millennials and precedes Generation Alpha. Gen-Z comprises of individuals born approximately between 1997 and 2012. Most members of Generation Z are the children of younger baby boomers or Generation X (Welkey et al., 2008). Worldwide tragedies like the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergence of social media, and the widespread use of smartphones have had a significant impact on this generation. Being the first generation to have grown up entirely in the digital age, Gen-Z is distinguished by its significant reliance on social media, love of visual content, and steadfast commitment to social justice and activism (Sharma & Singh, 2024).

GENERATION Z'S CHARACTERISTICS AND GLOBAL IMPACT

This generation is known for having access to unmatched alternatives and information, as well as being incredibly diverse and globally connected. Their impact on the economy and society is anticipated to increase dramatically over the next several years as they progressively join the workforce. Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials (Gen Y), and now Gen-Z are the generations that have influenced workplace culture and societal trends over the years (Rue, 2018).



DIGITAL IDENTITY OF GENERATION Z

Research indicates that Gen-Z exhibits distinct patterns in social media usage, with YouTube being the most preferred platform (42.7%), followed by WhatsApp (11.8%) and Instagram (9%). A significant proportion of this demographic, 80.1%, spends multiple hours daily on social media, primarily for self-updating (45.5%), entertainment (32%), and educational purposes (24.3%). (Sharma & Singh, 2024).

GEN-Z'S GRATIFICATIONS FULFILLED BY LIFESTYLE VLOGS

YouTube provides a wide variety of video formats to meet the needs of different audiences. People who are looking for information and knowledge, can watch television programs, news, Technology, Entertainment, and Design (TED) Talks. Lifestyle vlogs, on the other hand, satisfy the desire for social interaction by encouraging viewers to connect with the vlogger through comments. In order to improve the whole experience, vloggers and viewers work to make communication more engaging and natural (Biel & Gatica-Perez, 2012). Vlogs, particularly lifestyle vlogs, have emerged as a new favorite among Gen-Z, as they effectively gratify their diverse needs for entertainment, inspiration, escapism and social connection which includes:

1) **RELAXATION:** Relaxation includes elements of escapism, where users turn to YouTube as a diversion from daily stressors. Gen-Z often uses YouTube as a means to detach from reality and immerse themselves in relatable or entertaining content (Diana, 2020).

2) **ENTERTAINMENT:** Closely linked to relaxation is the gratification of entertainment. For many Gen-Z users, lifestyle vlogs act as a remedy for boredom or monotony, offering both emotional engagement and a break from routine. Thus, the dual appeal of escapism and entertainment makes YouTube a favored platform for relaxation and satisfaction (Razi & Ghazali, 2023).

3) **INSPIRATION:** By showcasing aspirational lifestyles—whether through fitness journeys, self-care routines, or career milestones—vloggers inspire viewers to adopt healthier habits, set personal goals, and embrace positivity (Nguyen, Pham & Truong, 2023). This motivational aspect helps establish a strong connection between the creator and the audience, encouraging viewers to see themselves as capable of similar achievements.

4) **SOCIAL INTERACTION:** Many Gen-Z users engage in these virtual interactions to connect with vloggers and fellow viewers who share similar interests. The informal and conversational tone of vlogs develops parasocial relationships, where viewers feel a personal bond with the vlogger despite the one-sided nature of the interaction (Fouhey et al., 2018). This perceived closeness not only deepens audience engagement but also fulfills their need for social belonging in the digital space.

ADVERSE OUTCOMES OF CONSUMING LIFESTYLE VLOGS

Lifestyle vlogs are a potent medium for addressing the emotional and social gratifications of Gen-Z. Because of its multifarious appeal, it has the ability to simultaneously entertain, inspire and connect people. However, when these gratifications immerse users in escapism, the eventual return to reality often intensifies emotional distress. Excessive and prolonged consumption of such content has notable emotional and mental health challenges, including increased stress levels, intensified anxiety, growing dissatisfaction with one's own life and many other adverse outcomes (Sharma & Singh, 2024).

1) **UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AND SOCIAL COMPARISON:** The edited and targeted nature of these vlogs often develop unrealistic expectations, leaving viewers dissatisfied with their own lives. This dissatisfaction can manifest in social comparison, where individuals judge themselves against the idealized lifestyles depicted in vlogs, leading to body image concerns and pressure to conform to unattainable beauty standards (Yan, 2021).

2) **PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS: STRESS, ANXIETY, AND FOMO:** Prolonged exposure to these portrayals frequently heightens stress and anxiety, while unmet expectations may result in depression and mood swings. The phenomenon of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) aggravates a sense of inadequacy and contributes to identity struggles and self-perception challenges as viewers attempt to match their real lives with the content they consume (Talukdar, 2020).

3) **DISTRACTIONS AND UNPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIORS:** Lifestyle vlogs often act as distractions, encouraging procrastination and diminishing motivation, which leads to unproductive behaviors (Abiera, 2024). Additionally, Cognitive dissonance arises when viewers find the content at odds with their personal values, leaving them in a state of internal conflict (Festinger, 1962).

4) **SUPERFICIAL SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND FEELINGS OF ISOLATION:** While lifestyle vlogs can create a superficial sense of social connection, this connection often lacks authenticity, leading to feelings of isolation as the relationships depicted fail to reflect genuine, real-life interactions (Andriopoulou & Servina, 2021). These psychological challenges highlight the complex influence of lifestyle vlogs on Gen-Z and emphasize the need for balanced media consumption and critical engagement with online content.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is the first theoretical framework that directs this study. The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the concept of the Uses and Gratification theory (UGT) which states that people have specific needs or gratifications that they seek to fulfill through mass media. The origins of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) was found back in 1940s, by Lazarsfeld's research (Rubin, 2009, p. 168). Theory identifies these needs and would lead them to engage with a particular type of media in order to satisfy those needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). UGT believes that the motivations and practices of media usage mostly rely on viewers rather than the communications of media institutions. The decision to repeatedly utilize a media is a consequence of the degree of satisfaction it can provide (University of Twente, 2019, p. 20). Connecting to this study it explores the motivational factors that drive audiences to use specific media and the satisfaction they get from it. This approach investigates what motivates audiences to use particular media and what kind of satisfaction they get from it. In this study, UGT remains particularly relevant since it looks at the various needs and gratifications that Generation Z fulfills through watching lifestyle vlogs. These gratifications include entertainment, social interaction, escapism, and inspiration. The theory was selected based on understanding from the literature review, which emphasized the importance of understanding media consumption motivations among young audiences.

The second framework employed is the Cultivation Theory which was developed by George Gerbner in the 1960s to understand how television influences viewers' perceptions of the world which investigates the long-term effects of media exposure on individual's perceptions of reality. This theory was first used to examine television, but it has now been modified to examine the influence of digital media, such as YouTube. Cultivation theory is particularly significant for analyzing how prolonged exposure to consuming lifestyle content affects Gen-Z's perceptions of success, beauty, and happiness, often leading to unrealistic expectations, social comparisons, anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses.

Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for understanding the relationship between the immediate fulfillment of gratifications and the long-term psychological impacts of consuming lifestyle vlogs. By integrating UGT and cultivation theory, this study seeks to learn how lifestyle vlogs affect Gen-Z's mental well-being in Pakistan by examining the reasons behind their media consumption as well as the wider impacts on their identity, aspirations, and self-perception.

For **Gen-Z**, lifestyle vlogs have become a particularly popular way to pass time. These vlogs, with their engaging content and relatable themes, offer a compelling escape from hectic routine. By showcasing day-in-the-life stories, aspirational lifestyles, and dynamic personalities, lifestyle vlogs captivate Gen-Z viewers, keeping them entertained and emotionally engaged during their free time. The algorithmic personalization of

platforms like YouTube further enhances this experience by their content tailored to individual interests, ensuring that viewers remain engaged till the end of the video. Lifestyle vlogs exemplify this purpose by offering escapism and amusement through engaging, diverse content that resonates with the audience's interests. From immersive travel experiences to practical beauty tips, these vlogs help viewers alleviate boredom and enhance leisure time. Platforms like YouTube cater to these needs by using algorithms to personalize content recommendations, ensuring a continuous stream of enjoyable and relevant videos.

RELAXATION: Relaxation is a key reason why individuals watch TV. Relaxation differs from entertainment as it focuses on reducing stress, while entertainment emphasizes fun (Palmgreen and Rayburn's, 1979). Our delineation of this theme acknowledges the unique motives steering social media usage for relaxation purposes. This terminology precisely captures users' intended interactions with social media platforms to seek relaxation and cope with the pressures of daily life, aligning with present-day trends in digital stress management strategies.

For Gen-Z, lifestyle vlogs serve as a stress-relief mechanism, helping viewers unwind and momentarily escape their daily pressures. This gratification focuses on creating a calming effect rather than simply entertaining (Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999).

CONVENIENCE UTILITY: The category of Convenience Utility in social media usage is concerned with the provision of convenience or usefulness to individuals. This usage pattern was identified by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) through their construct called convenience for internet uses. Similarly, Ko et al (2005) explored a convenience motivation factor for interactive advertising.

By applying UGT to this context, this study investigates how lifestyle vlogs gratify the needs of Gen-Z in Pakistan while simultaneously contributing to adverse mental health outcomes, thereby bridging the gap between media consumption patterns and their psychological impacts. Further, the long-term effect of lifestyle vlogs and its impact on viewers' perception and attitude over time can be studied through cultivation theory, which will give a holistic view of the long-term effects of constant exposure to such content.

Cultivation theory is appropriate for addressing the research questions as cultivation theory was originally focused on television, it is practical to make connections and identify patterns across other media i.e. social media. Furthermore, one can draw connections between the effects of television media on viewers and those generated by content on YouTube or other audiovisual platforms. Secondly, if we consider media consumption and habits as a result of media effects, we can employ cultivation theory to investigate whether these habits enhance or diminish youth's ability to critically navigate the mass media (Dahle, 2022).

Thirdly, the immaturity of Gen-Z viewers makes them more susceptible to the influence of media exposure. When applied to lifestyle vlogs, this theory suggests that the curated, aspirational portrayals in vlogs can cultivate distorted perceptions of what is a "successful" or "ideal" life. Lifestyle vlogs can cause,

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

This is mono-method research. A mono-method choice refers to the use of a single research method whether qualitative or quantitative into which a study will focus data collection and analysis. It focuses exclusively on one type of data collection like interviews or a survey to meet the research objectives (Saunders, 2009). In this study, a qualitative

research method was employed to explore Gen-Z's engagement with lifestyle vlogs on YouTube and understand the impact of such content on their mental well-being. A qualitative study is a research approach that explores human experiences, behaviors, and social phenomena by non-numeric data collection and analysis through interviews, observations, focus groups, textual analysis, narrative analysis, content analysis, discourse analysis and case studies (Wallo, Lundqvist, & Coetzer, 2024).

Qualitative research is relating to the meaning and process where it might not be examinable through quantity or amount. Qualitative research aims to provide specific understanding to a phenomenon based on the ones experience with less generalization. Furthermore, qualitative research is aimed to attain deep understanding of a specific case with in depth exploratory studies to enable finding quality responses throughout the research (Creswell, 2015).

RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY AND RESEARCH APPROACH

Interpretivism is a philosophical standpoint that has emerged as an antithesis to positivism. The latter gives more prominence to objective and measurable information. Unlike positivism, interpretivism places emphasis on understanding the human experience complexity and perspectives. This research approach recognizes that people interpret things in a subjective manner and uniquely; thus, information gathered using the interpretivist approach may not be generalizable to larger populations (Scotland, 2012).

The study will involve some of the general characteristics associated with the interpretivist paradigm, Therefore, based on the characteristics provided by the interpretivism paradigm, qualitative research methods are the best tools for achieving deep insights related to a specific context. By nature, the research is exploratory so an inductive approach is employed in this research.

SAMPLING DESIGN

POPULATION: The population for this research consists of Gen-Z individuals in Pakistan who regularly consume lifestyle vlogs on YouTube. This group is characterized by distinct traits, including an age range (primarily individuals born between 1997 and 2012), their engagement with lifestyle vlogs, and their role within the Pakistani cultural and social environment. This population offers a comprehensive analysis of the influence of lifestyle vlogs on the psychological well-being and social values of Gen-Z in Pakistan. By targeting this particular demographic, in a specific geographic setting, the research assures that the findings will provide significant insights into the diverse experiences and issues encountered by this generation regarding their media consumption habits. However, researchers often work with smaller subsets called samples when examining the entire population, as these samples can provide meaningful analysis and results.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

This research study utilizes Purposive and Convenience (non-probability) sampling techniques which do not involve random selection of participants but intentional approach is considered. In purposive sampling technique the participants are selected intentionally based on a specific criteria relevant to the research topic. In this study, participants are required to belong to Gen-Z (born between 1997 and 2012), reside in Pakistan and be a regular consumers of lifestyle vlogs on youtube. This method of sampling is appropriate for qualitative studies because it allows researchers to focus on individuals who are likely to provide in-depth and holistic information about the phenomenon under study (Etikan et al., 2016).

SAMPLE SIZE: The interview sample size consists of 30 participants, from various cities across Pakistan. These participants represented Gen-Z demographics aged between 12-27 years, including both males and females all living in urban areas. The selection ensured a mix of perspectives, capturing a broad understanding of how lifestyle vlogs impact Gen-Z viewers in different urban contexts.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

To get detailed information about the personal opinion and experiences of the respondents interview guide, a tool for qualitative research is used. Interview guide was semi-structured with the open-ended questions with probing to get the elaborated point of views of the respondents. Interview guide is one form of questionnaire which allows flexible and alternative wording of the question which is needed. To discover how the respondents perceived the role of lifestyle vlogs in affecting their mental well-being.

CONSTRUCTION OF INTERVIEW GUIDE

The total number of questions in interview guide are 42. The duration of interviews ranges from 20 to 30 minutes and interviews were recorded for analysis and report writing. The interview guide covers the following features of the study:

- 1. VIEWING HABITS AND PREFERENCES:** Understanding participants' frequency, duration, and preferences for watching lifestyle vlogs, shedding light on their initial motivations and favorite content types.
- 2. GRATIFICATIONS (MOTIVATIONS FOR WATCHING):** Understanding why viewers engage with lifestyle vlogs, including seeking knowledge, entertainment, emotional connection, self-expression, or escape from reality.
- 3. PSYCHOLOGICAL/MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS:** Understanding how vlogs influence viewers' mental health by creating pressures for perfection, developing comparisons, or triggering feelings of inadequacy and apathy.
- 4. REFLECTIONS ON THE CONTENT (AUTHENTICITY AND STAGED CONTENT):** Questions the perceived realism of vlogs, probing whether they accurately portray life or present an idealized and curated version of reality.
- 5. IMPACT ON PRODUCTIVITY AND LIFE GOALS (MOTIVATION, PRODUCTIVITY, AND ASPIRATIONS):** Understanding whether vlogs inspire viewers toward self-improvement or hinder productivity by promoting laziness or unrealistic aspirations.
- 6. OVERALL SENTIMENT AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:** Concludes with participants' holistic views on the impact of lifestyle vlogs and their recommendations for making content more relatable or beneficial.

MEDIUM OF INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interview guide questions were asked in Urdu as it is the native language and it would be more convenient to answer.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis is "the systematic organization and synthesis of the research data and the testing of research hypotheses, using those data" (Polit, 2004, p. 639). By using thematic analysis technique which is the most commonly used qualitative analysis technique the researchers transcribed, interpreted and analyzed qualitative data

THEMATIC ANALYSIS: This portion of the study analysis the specific themes of the study, **LIFESTYLE VLOGS ON YOUTUBE:** *Investigating Gen-Z Gratifications and Its Impact on their Mental Well-being in Pakistan*".

THEMES: Major themes to measure the viewer gratifications were identified as under.

- 1) Entertainment
- 2) Information Seeking and Inspiration
- 3) Social Connection and Validation
- 4) Relaxation and Escapism
- 5) Idealized Portrayals and Social Comparison
- 6) Body Image Concerns and Emotional Well-being
- 7) FOMO and Cognitive Dissonance
- 8) Materialism, Financial Stress, and Apathy

The first set of themes explored the gratifications users derive from consuming YouTube lifestyle vlogs, while the latter set focused on analyzing the psychological impacts resulting from this consumption.

ENTERTAINMENT: The primary gratification obtained by users is Entertainment. One participant shared, *"I watch lifestyle vlogs primarily for entertainment. They are a great source of happiness for me"*. He further explained how viral trends on YouTube are one of his top sources of entertainment, particularly because they provide humor and surprise. *"I find viral pranks and challenges the best part of lifestyle vlogs. I watch a lot of content where vloggers prank their friends, families or even strangers or do challenges like the 'Eat It Or Wear It', 'Try Not To Laugh' or 'Trying Weird Foods' challenge. There's something so satisfying about watching someone try something new and seeing their genuine reactions. It feels real, like you're getting a peek into their world and their unfiltered moments."* (Participant 3, male, 22). Viral challenges and trends are a significant form of entertainment for Gen Z viewers, as they offer humor, excitement, and a sense of shared cultural relevance. Through engaging with these types of vlogs, viewers feel connected to current trends and enjoy the thrill of watching influencers participate in the latest viral activities.

Additionally, the appeal of behind-the-scenes content adds authenticity to the entertainment experience, with another participant mentioning, *"Sistrology's daily vlogs are particularly enjoyable because they feature not only glamorous events and their daily routines but also their behind-the-scenes family time. Seeing how they handle family dynamics gives me ideas for strengthening my own relationships. There's a sense of relatability that makes me feel connected and entertained"* (Participant 16, female, 24). This emphasizes how viewers are drawn towards the content that mirrors real-life situations, particularly family interactions, which provide them with relatable lessons and emotional connection. This balance of authenticity and glamour helps create a deeper connection with the audience, making the content not only enjoyable but also meaningful. Through their family-oriented content, Viewers pointed out that engaging with YouTube Lifestyle Vlogs is one of their favorite things to do for meeting entertainment needs.

Another participant disclosed, *"I really enjoy watching Fatima Faisal's vlogs because her content is always so entertaining and unique. Most of her videos revolve around fun and unexpected themes like 'crashing a stranger's wedding,' which are hilarious and keep me hooked. Her creative approach and confident personality make her vlogs stand out, and I always look forward to what she comes up with next."* Such entertainment-driven lifestyle vlogs cater to viewers' need for amusement and provide a break from monotony. By creating highly engaging and unorthodox content, vloggers like Fatima Faisal create a strong connection with their audience, through their role as a source of entertainment and enjoyment.

INFORMATION SEEKING AND INSPIRATION

One participant emphasized that her primary motivation for watching lifestyle vlogs is to gain valuable information, particularly related to makeup, skincare, and haircare. She stated,

"The main reason I watch lifestyle vlogs is to learn something new, especially about makeup, skincare, and haircare. Merium Pervaiz's vlogs have been incredibly informative, offering practical tips on building a skincare routine, applying makeup for different occasions, and maintaining healthy hair with simple, effective products. Her home remedies and product reviews are especially helpful as they give honest feedback, which prevents me from wasting money on products that may not work. She often promotes affordable beauty products, which makes her content relatable for those on a budget but still wanting quality. Overall, watching her vlogs has greatly improved my understanding of skincare and makeup, and I now feel more confident in choosing the right products for myself" (Participant 15, female, 21). This response highlights the participant's motivation to seek out informational content that enhances their self-care practices, providing both practical and financial value through trusted recommendations and accessible beauty tips. For many viewers, this informational benefit can also be a key source of inspiration, encouraging them to make changes or improvements in their own lives.

For some viewers, lifestyle vlogs also inspire creativity. As one participant stated, *"Watching these vlogs gives me ideas about how to decorate my house, style my outfits, or even plan my day better. It's informative but also practical in many ways"* (Participant 10, female, 25). This response reflects the dual role of vlogs both as a source of information and personal growth which ensures that viewers not only gain new ideas but are also motivated to apply them in their own lives, from fashion tips to productivity hacks.

Similarly, fitness vlogs are particularly motivating for some viewers. As one participant explained, *"Adopting workout routines has always been a challenge for me. Seeing how some fitness vloggers integrate exercise into their daily life motivates me to stay active and maintain a healthy lifestyle"* (Participant 14, male, 23). This shows that the inspiring nature of lifestyle vlogs, whether those are health-related or centered on self-care not only encourages viewers to take action towards their personal goals but also develops a sense of accountability and self-improvement, as they are constantly exposed to positive and actionable content. This blend of knowledge, inspiration, and self-improvement explains why engaging with YouTube lifestyle vlogs remains a top preference for viewers.

SOCIAL CONNECTION AND VALIDATION: The theme of Social Connection emerged as a significant motivator for viewers of lifestyle vlogs. Many participants expressed feeling a deep sense of connection to the vloggers they follow, often describing these relationships as personal and meaningful despite their one-sided nature. This phenomenon, known as parasocial relationships (Hoffner & Bond, 2022), develops a sense of familiarity and emotional closeness with vloggers.

One participant articulated this connection, *"I feel very connected to the vloggers I watch. It's almost like they're a part of my daily routine, and I feel like I know them personally, even though we've never met. I've seen their growth and struggles, which makes me feel like I'm a part of their journey"* (Participant 7, female, 20). This explains how consistent exposure to vloggers' lives builds a sense of intimacy, making viewers feel as though they are actively involved in the vloggers' experiences.

Another participant shared, *"I feel more connected to vloggers when they do giveaway videos. It seems like a way for them to engage with their followers and give something back. I've participated in a few giveaways, and even though I didn't win, it made me feel included in their community. It's like they're reaching out to us, showing appreciation for the love and support we give them throughout their journey. It truly makes one feel special."* Vloggers use giveaways as a tool to develop a sense of social connection and engagement with their audience, making followers feel more involved and valued within the online community.

The sense of community extends beyond the vloggers to include interactions with other viewers. Comment sections and social media platforms serve as spaces for engagement and community-building. As one participant shared, *"I do interact sometimes in the comment sections, especially when I feel like I really relate to something the vlogger shared. I feel more engaged when I can discuss something I've watched with people who have the same interests. It's a nice feeling when you get likes on your comment or even replies from other viewers or the creator of that video. It feels like you are part of a community where you can exchange opinions, share your experience, help others and give your feedback through your comments"* (Participant 12, male, 22). This social communication allows viewers not only to consume content but also engage in shared discussions, for a collective sense of belonging. Lifestyle vlogs go beyond passive consumption, contributing to a richer, more interactive viewing experience.

The theme of Validation emerged as a key reason why viewers engage with lifestyle vlogs. Participants shared how these vlogs help them feel represented, seen, and reassured in their personal experiences. Vloggers' relatability and openness create a sense of comfort and self-acceptance among viewers.

A participant expressed how relatable content from vloggers addressing personal struggles positively influenced her emotions, *"I relate a lot to the vloggers, especially the ones who show their imperfections and struggles, like dealing with anxiety or body image issues. It makes me feel like I'm not alone in what I go through. It's nice seeing someone who shares similar experiences"* (Participant 9, female, 21). The reassurance that viewers seek in content that mirrors their own challenges thrive a sense of validation and emotional support.

In addition to emotional reassurance, lifestyle vlogs also play a role in influencing viewers' self-perception and confidence. As one participant explained, *"Watching certain vloggers who are confident and comfortable with their natural selves makes me think about how I see myself. I've started being more confident in my skin and embracing my flaws"* (Participant 3, male, 24). Such vlogs can inspire viewers to adopt a more positive self-image, influenced by the authenticity, self-love and self-assurance of their favorite content creators.

Furthermore, lifestyle vlogs encourage viewers to actively engage and imitate aspects of vloggers' lifestyles. One participant shared, *"I have posted about a few vloggers I admire. Sometimes, I even try to recreate their makeup looks or adopt parts of their routines. It's not just about mimicking them, but trying to integrate some of their positivity or habits into my life"* (Participant 6, female, 19). This shows how viewers not only relate to vloggers but also aspire to incorporate their routines and habits into their own lives as a means of self-improvement and personal growth.

RELAXATION AND ESCAPISM: For many participants, lifestyle vlogs provide a much-needed escape from their daily stresses, monotony and create opportunities for relaxation.

One participant shared their preference for watching family-oriented vlogs, particularly highlighting the comedic and entertaining content of a well-known vlogger, *"I enjoy binge-watching family vlogs when I'm feeling down. Ducky Bhai is one of my favorite vloggers. I like his overall content. Initially, he was a gamer and used to do gaming live streams, but then he shifted towards daily vlogging, which includes his family and friends. His content has a comedic factor. He is also known for his parodies and prank calls. He has that Lahori accent, which makes his videos even funnier. It's a great way to shift my focus from my own problems to something more positive, exciting, and switches my mood into laughter"* (Participant 8, female, 20).

The need for relaxation along with the escapism-specific manifestations are highly connected with the need for entertainment (Buf & Ștefăniță, 2020). This emphasizes how comedic aspect in lifestyle vlogs can act as an emotional diversion for viewers, allowing them to momentarily set aside their worries and immerse themselves in humor and positivity. By engaging with relatable and entertaining family vlogs, viewers not only achieve relaxation but also experience a sense of joy and emotional upliftment.

A significant gratification identified among viewers is relaxation, which often overlaps with escapism. For many participants, lifestyle vlogs serve as a temporary escape from stress and daily challenges. As another participant expressed, *"When I am much stressed, and I get on YouTube, I try to focus on the video, and I am not interested in any other thing at that moment. I usually watch minimalism or DIY and crafting vlogs. Seeing how vloggers simplify their lives and create something with their hands is so therapeutic. Watch those creating calming spaces and trying something new gives me a sense of peace and helps me relax"* (Participant 10, female, 21). This how YouTube provides a sense of detachment from real-life pressures, offering users a mental break through engaging and enjoyable content.

One more participant shared, *"After a long day at work, I love watching travel vlogs. They take me to places I've never been and allow me to experience the beauty of the world without leaving my room. It's like a mini vacation for my mind, offering me a much-needed escape from the stress of daily life. I find the serene landscapes and vibrant cultures showcased in these vlogs incredibly soothing and inspiring. They also spark my curiosity and fuel my dreams of traveling in the future. Watching these vlogs helps me relax, unwind, and temporarily disconnect from the pressures of reality, leaving me feeling refreshed and recharged"* (Participant 7, male, 25). This explains how travel vlogs fulfill a dual purpose by offering both relaxation and mental stimulation.

IDEALIZED PORTRAYALS AND SOCIAL COMPARISON

A recurring sentiment among participants was the tendency to compare their own lives with the idealized lifestyles depicted in vlogs, often resulting in feelings of inadequacy, dissatisfaction and comparison. One participant shared, *"Watching these vlogs sometimes makes me feel like my life is boring or not good enough. The vloggers seem to have everything – a perfect home, a glamorous lifestyle, and endless opportunities. When I watch them regularly, it becomes harder not to compare myself and wonder why my life isn't like that"* (Participant 4, female, 20).

This feeling was particularly pronounced when discussing vloggers like **Rajab Butt**, who frequently showcases a luxurious lifestyle. As the participant noted *"Rajab Butt's content includes flaunting expensive cars, high-end watches, and disclosing his significant income from creating what many perceive as low-quality content. Recently, he got married and his wedding vlogs highlighted extravagant rituals such as his friends and family*

showering money over him, further magnified unrealistic expectations for many viewers. Watching this made me feel like such displays of wealth and luxury are what define happiness and success, even though I know they are far beyond what most people can achieve." Such portrayals create a sense of unattainable standards that distort perceptions of happiness, success, and fulfillment. Regular exposure to these vlogs continues a cycle of social comparison, where viewers measure their self-worth against the curated, idealized lives of vloggers. This not only reinforces feelings of inadequacy but also instills unrealistic expectations, making it difficult for viewers to appreciate their own achievements and circumstances.

One of the participants explained, *"I try to remind myself that what they show isn't their full reality, but it's tough when every video feels like a highlight of everything, I wish I had – the clothes, the vacations, and even the relationships"* (Participant 7, female, 19). By depicting an exaggerated version of reality, vloggers unintentionally influence viewers' perceptions, leading to a disconnection between their expectations and actual experiences.

Participants frequently expressed concerns about the unrealistic portrayal of relationships in lifestyle vlogs, noting how such portrayals contribute to distorted expectations and dissatisfaction in real-life relationships. One participant highlighted this issue, stating, *"Couples in lifestyle vlogs appear so lovey-dovey on screen, as if they've never had a fight, argument, or disagreement. The male partner is often seen gifting something expensive to his wife, which creates pressure for other couples. Married women begin complaining to their husbands for not surprising or gifting them, while unmarried girls idealize these couples, forming unrealistic expectations of their future husbands."* This idealization of relationships portrayed in vlogs develops an unattainable standard of perfection. Participants indicated that such portrayals disregard the complexities and challenges of real-life relationships, instead presenting a curated narrative that focuses on extravagant gestures and constant harmony. As another participant remarked, *"It's very wrong because relationships are being destroyed due to these idealized portrayals and the unrealistic expectations they create."* (Participant 1, female, 25).

A participant bluntly described *"I believe that lifestyle vloggers are selling themselves and their families for fame and financial gain. They showcase their personal lives in a way that feels staged, turning what should be private moments into content for public consumption. This kind of content creates an illusion and it has nothing to do with reality. These vloggers present a perfect, glamorous life that is far removed from the challenges and struggles people face in everyday life. It's all about aesthetics and image, and they're constantly pushing an ideal that is unattainable for most viewers. Watching this kind of content doesn't inspire me, it makes me question the authenticity of everything they share."*

BODY IMAGE CONCERNS AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING: The idea of a 'perfect body' or a 'perfect lifestyle' promoted through lifestyle vlogs have been triggering many Gen-Z viewers consuming that idealized content. One participant shared, *"Sometimes, watching these vlogs makes me feel like I don't measure up. The vloggers always look flawless – perfect skin, toned bodies, and designer clothes. It makes me feel inadequate about my own appearance, especially when I notice how different I look in comparison. I've caught myself wishing I could be more like them, even though I know they use filters and professional lighting to look that way"* (Participant 12, female, 22).

Another participant highlighted how beauty vloggers contribute to heightened self-consciousness and impact viewers' self-esteem. She discussed, *"Watching certain beauty vloggers has made me more self-conscious. They promote so many beauty treatments and*

cosmetic procedures as if it's a must-have to look beautiful. I often compare their before and after fame pictures, which show a huge difference, emphasizing that money and fame can buy them an improved appearance. It's exhausting trying to keep up with them, and it often feels like I'm falling short because I can't afford these things. Sometimes, it affects my self-esteem and makes me feel less confident about my natural self" (Participant 8, female, 21). This response illustrates the impact of lifestyle vlogs on viewers' perceptions of their appearance, emphasizing how content that glorifies unattainable beauty standards can lead to feelings of inadequacy.

One of the participants has noticed, *"I feel down after watching certain vlogs because they constantly promote this idea of perfectionism. I am skinny, and no matter how hard I hit the gym, it will take time for me to get in a good shape."* These feelings sometimes spiral into sadness and hopelessness. Sometimes, I wish they would show more relatable, everyday struggles instead of only the highlights and sponsorships" (Participant 14, male, 20).

Lifestyle vlogs often set unrealistic expectations regarding fitness and body image by showcasing transformations that are backed by significant resources like personal trainers, diets and brand sponsorships. Such portrayals can lead viewers to feel inadequate and frustrated, particularly when their own circumstances make achieving similar results unattainable. The lack of transparency about the challenges and struggles behind these transformations develops a false perception of reality, contributing to stress, anxiety, and feelings of unworthiness among viewers.

Another participant revealed, *"Over time, I've become so addicted to lifestyle vlogs that it's now part of my night routine. Even when I go to bed intending to sleep, I find myself picking up my phone to check if any of my favorite vloggers have uploaded new content. This habit has disrupted my sleep schedule entirely. I stay up late scrolling through videos, and before I realize it, hours have passed. The lack of sleep has started to take a toll on my health. I've developed dark circles under my eyes, and I feel constantly fatigued during the day. Not being able to sleep properly has also led to heightened anxiety. I'm always on edge, worrying about things I should be doing but can't seem to focus on. Over time, this has spiraled into feelings of sadness and hopelessness. Watching these vlogs, which were once a source of entertainment, has now become something that's negatively affecting my mental and physical well-being"* (Participant 15, female, 21)

FOMO AND COGNITIVE DISSONANCE: Expressing view about conflict of two thought and fear of isolation One participant expressed how lifestyle vlogs create a sense of exclusion and inadequacy, contributing to the fear of missing out (FOMO), *"Lifestyle vlogs often leave me feeling like I'm not part of something bigger. For example, when I see vloggers attending events with other famous influencers, exploring exotic locations, I feel left out, like I'm missing out on opportunities I didn't even know existed. Whenever I see vloggers posting about celebrating their exclusive events such as birthday bashes, wedding or occasions like Eid, new year etc, exchanging expensive gifts, going on lavish vacations and sharing their latest accomplishments, I can't help but feel like I'm missing out on everything because neither I have such friends nor I am an influencer myself. It makes me question whether I'm doing enough with my life. Seeing someone my age living such an exciting and adventurous life creates this nagging fear that I'm falling behind and not making the most of my time. I often feel pressured to do more, even if it's unrealistic for my circumstances. This constant feeling of being out of the loop affects my mood and makes me feel inadequate"* (Participant 12, male, 23).

Lifestyle vlogs can amplify FOMO by presenting scripted lifestyles that many viewers find unattainable. Besides, lifestyle vlogs including travel vlogs contribute to FOMO by showcasing experiences that feel unreal to viewers, particularly when these activities require significant resources or a daring lifestyle. Such content can leave viewers feeling inadequate or as though they're missing out on fulfilling their own dreams and adventures.

Participants also discussed that while these vlogs are a source of entertainment and admiration, they simultaneously induce guilt and discomfort due to their impact on viewers' self-perception and productivity. A participant shared, *"There's always an internal conflict when I watch lifestyle vlogs. On one hand, I enjoy their content and look up to their success. But on the other hand, I feel guilty for spending time watching them instead of focusing on my own goals. While these vlogs are entertaining, they often feel like a complete show-off, which adds to my mixed feelings. It's like I'm torn between admiring them and resenting how their artificial lives make me feel. Sometimes, I wonder if watching these vlogs is even beneficial for me, but I can't stop because they're so addictive."* (Participant 10, male, 22). Such content can trap viewers in a cycle of admiration, guilt, and self-doubt, reflecting the psychological strain of reconciling the enjoyment of content with its negative emotional impact.

A participant explained, *I admire how many lifestyle influencers present and style themselves; they often look great. However, as a Muslim, I know I cannot adopt their way of dressing because it is heavily inspired by Western trends and doesn't align with Islamic guidelines for women's attire. It's disheartening to see how some influencers encourage girls to embrace such styles without considering the Islamic dress code. While I don't judge them personally, watching this kind of content feels unproductive to me and leaves me feeling upset* (Participant 19, Female, 24).

Another participant disclosed, *"I often feel conflicted because I want to have what they have, but the reality of my financial and personal limitations makes it impossible."* (Participant 7, female, 20).

FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal a complex relationship between Gen-Z viewers and lifestyle vlogs, highlighting both the gratifications they seek and the challenges they face as a result of consuming such content. Lifestyle vlogs primarily serve as a source of entertainment, offering viewers an escape from their daily routines. While this escapism can be fulfilling, it often comes with unintended consequences such as excessive screen time, disrupted sleep patterns, and addiction to consuming content. Many viewers find themselves drawn to the made-up lives of vloggers, seeking inspiration and getting influenced from aspirational lifestyles, fashion, beauty, and travel. However, this constant comparison with the seemingly perfect lives portrayed in vlogs often leads to negative emotions, including feelings of inadequacy and frustration.

The glamorization of idealized beauty standards in these vlogs significantly affects viewers' body image and emotional well-being. Vloggers often present flawless appearances achieved through filters, beauty treatments, or cosmetic procedures, setting unattainable benchmarks for their audiences. This can result in viewers feeling dissatisfied with their natural looks, diminished self-esteem, and heightened self-consciousness. Similarly, the portrayal of luxurious lifestyles and transformative fitness journeys creates unrealistic expectations that can cause anxiety, sadness, and a sense of hopelessness among viewers who find such achievements beyond their reach.

Many participants also expressed experiencing the fear of missing out (FOMO) due to the exclusive content shared by vloggers, such as luxurious events, unboxing videos, and travel adventures. These portrayals of an unattainable lifestyle develop a sense of exclusion and inadequacy, leaving viewers questioning whether they are doing enough in their own lives. The cognitive dissonance caused by admiring vloggers' success while feeling guilty about their inability to match such lifestyles creates a constant internal struggle, further affecting viewers' mental health.

Furthermore, this research highlights that Gen-Z consumes lifestyle vlogs primarily to experience raw, unfiltered content and derive pleasure from observing what is happening in someone else's life.

Additionally, lifestyle vlogs negatively impact viewers' productivity and motivation. Binge-watching these vlogs often causes apathy, a lack of interest in daily responsibilities. This pattern of unproductivity is particularly concerning for individuals with conditions like ADHD, who find themselves distracted and unmotivated to engage in real-life tasks. The study also revealed the emotional conflict viewers experience while consuming lifestyle vlogs. Although they enjoy the content and admire vloggers' success, many feel a sense of resentment over the negative impact it has on their mental well-being, finances, and self-esteem..

The findings emphasized the dual nature of lifestyle vlogs. While they offer entertainment and aspirational content, they also generate significant psychological, emotional, and financial challenges for Gen-Z viewers. A few participants reported being positively gratified by these vlogs, such as learning new skills or feeling inspired. However, the majority highlighted negative effects, including unrealistic portrayals of beauty, wealth, and success, which contribute to anxiety, stress, and dissatisfaction. Additionally, excessive consumption patterns were linked to unproductivity, apathy, and a sense of inadequacy.

CONCLUSION

This research explored the relationship between the gratifications sought by Gen-Z viewers in Pakistan from YouTube lifestyle vlogs and the psychological effects of consuming such content. The findings revealed that lifestyle vlogs cater to various needs, including entertainment, inspiration, social connection, and escapism, aligning with the Uses and Gratifications Theory. However, this consumption comes with dual impacts. While lifestyle vlogs provide moments of joy, motivation, and emotional relief, they also contribute to significant negative consequences, particularly prolonged consumption develops social comparison, unrealistic expectations, and materialistic approach in viewers. Guided by the Cultivation Theory, the study shows how repeated exposure to scripted and idealized lifestyles can shape viewers' perceptions of reality, often leading to mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and feelings of inadequacy. The luxurious nature of these vlogs can further result in financial stress and FOMO (fear of missing out), especially among Gen-Z audiences. Moreover, family-centric lifestyle vlogs, while popular, raise ethical concerns regarding privacy, identity development, and the commodification of children's lives.

While this study focused on the gratifications and mental well-being of Gen-Z viewers in Pakistan, its findings underscore the broader implications of digital media consumption. Future research could expand this scope to include other platforms like Instagram or TikTok, adopt quantitative methods for generalizability, or explore long-term behavioral and economic impacts. These insights can serve as a foundation for

developing media literacy programs and ethical guidelines to foster a healthier and more balanced media environment, mitigating the adverse effects of lifestyle vlog consumption.

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