**[Your life, my entertainment](https://www.dawn.com/news/1692559/your-life-my-entertainment)**

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YOU can see it happen on reality shows. Participants who are living ordinary lives suddenly find that the world’s voyeurism — curiosity about how other people live — can become a lucrative source of income, even riches. Initially, the couple or family just lives the life they had, as viewers watch them raise their 15 children, or live their lives as little people or participate in some elimination game where the worst fate is getting kicked out of some mansion or marrying someone sight unseen.

In one show that airs on the American network glibly titled The Learning Channel, an overweight woman documents her travails in trying to find a partner as she runs a dance club. Someone, I imagine, tells these people that this is just their 10 minutes in the world’s allotment of 15 famous minutes. I can also imagine that a good number of these folks imagine that they will be different. They will always be random voyeurs interested in what they ate in a day or how they prepare chicken curry.

But the end does come, and you can see which reality shows have content that is being suggested by the show’s producers and would never have been a part of the reality show star’s life had it not been for the piles of money the show has suddenly brought into their lives. There are flashy vacations to Europe and stays in five-star hotels. There are new homes full of snazzy upmarket appliances and new cars, even as the stars have nothing in terms of a career or vocation.

In other episodes, long-forgotten exes and rejected friends show up. An attempt is made to create some engrossing conflict that will accomplish the ultimate goal of every such show: keep the audience hooked. Eventually, even these ideas begin to run out; the fights that people on the show have are no longer the ordinary fights that viewers can identify with. Now, they are the problems of those who have hit sudden jackpots, whose income levels have gone far above those of their former friends and jealous relatives. This is the end for the show; the private lives that were being presented have been chewed up and spat out. Waiting in the shadows are other reality stars who think they will beat this cycle, who imagine they will be famous and hence rich forever.

Vloggers suffer from burnout from constantly producing likeable and viewable content.

Pakistan does not have the avalanche of reality shows that are proliferating in India and in the West. But while television networks have stayed out of the game, via the proliferation of platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, with the former actually paying content creators by views, it is easy to develop one’s own reality show. Behold the arrival of the vloggers, people who document their days and doings on camera and then, thanks to some basic editing, setting to music etc, are able to produce an individual version of a reality show.

Most of these vlogs are watched only by immediate circles of friends and family netting not more than a few hundred views at best. These vlogs are consistent for a while, the vlogger having heeded earnest advice about developing a following and staying consistent. Most times, however, these do not get the kind of viewership that would make the effort a lucrative venture. Some keep at it, throwing their words and experiences out into the world in the hope that someone will hear them, perhaps even benefit from them, or connect with them.

The real test is only set before those whose vlogs take off. Most of those who see this happen are already semi-famous or ‘fame-adjacent’, meaning that they are related to someone who already has a large audience and is pushing their vlog. Here again, you see the same life cycle of the reality show star. At first, there is endearing glee; the vlog takes off and the thousands of views each pay $0.18. Given the exchange rate between the dollar and the rupee, it means that a pretty penny can be made, especially if the vlog is a daily offering.

At this point, the vlogs feature the details of their lives. Having foregone privacy, we are taken inside bedrooms, inside closets and cupboards, inside relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, inside fights with friends, onto restaurant tables, and so on. The best at it are those who simply do not seem to mind that they have exchanged privacy for money. Since there has not been a monetary value put on privacy, it feels like easy money.

What they do not seem to realise is that at some point during this pursuit, the stars of these self-produced show go from documenting their lives to choreographing their lives for the sake of a vlog. When recording yourself is your source of income, then it is hard not to make decisions with successful vlogging in mind, what looks good on camera or what viewers engage with the most. Suddenly, the terms of living life transform from being judged by their inherent value or enjoyment to whether they are good material. Then there is the constant fear of losing the viewers and the views that have been acquired thus far, a fear so real that viewers begin to control rather than only consume the content presented to them.

It may seem surprising in this day and age where everyone is an influencer that these self-made stars suffer from burnout from constantly producing likeable and viewable content. Some experience such psychological fallout that they have to quit altogether. Others have to cut down or take breaks or simply lose viewers. It is a terrible outcome but one that proves that monetising something that was not initially allotted a monetary value can have consequences. The private life of individuals can seem like easy money when the truth is that there is no such thing as free money.

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