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## FRAMING THEORY : MEDIA DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI DRAMA “MAYI RI”

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the portrayal of child marriage in the Pakistani drama Mayi Ri through the lens of Framing Theory. By employing a quantitative research design, data was collected via a structured Likert scale questionnaire distributed among viewers familiar with the drama. The findings reveal that Mayi Ri effectively uses framing techniques to raise awareness, challenge societal norms, and inspire critical reflection on the issue of child marriage. Key frames identified include victimization, societal pressure, empowerment, and social change, each contributing to a nuanced representation of the struggles faced by child brides. The drama's resolution, emphasizing education, co-parenting, and mutual respect, was praised as progressive and impactful, encouraging viewers to reconsider harmful traditions. This study underscores the transformative potential of media in shaping public discourse and fostering social reform, illustrating how Mayi Ri serves as a powerful tool for addressing sensitive societal issues in Pakistan.



## INTRODUCTION

Dramas play a significant role in reflecting the culture and social trends of any society (Happer & Philo, 2013; Imada, 2012). These dramas serve as a window into the values, beliefs, ideas, norms, and traditions that people follow (Fejes, 1981; Malik, 2013). Viewers can derive much of this information about how people live, behave, and think by simply watching these dramas (Gerbner et al., 1994; Ali, 2016). The entertainment industry, especially through dramas, functions as a mirror that unveils the essence of society (Jamil, 2017; Zia, 2017). Pakistani dramas, in particular, play a subtle yet powerful role in shaping societal perceptions in ways that may not have been possible through other means (Happer & Philo, 2013; Gerbner et al., 1994). The stories portrayed in these dramas are not just forms of entertainment; rather, they offer a glimpse into the lives of millions of people and their struggles (Ahmad & Saleem, 2019; Jensen & Rosengren, 1990).

Pakistani dramas, in particular, go deeper, portraying cultural values tied to family and honor, going beyond the scope of scripted fiction (Hussain, 2020; Fejes, 1981). As Hussain and Niaz (2020) argue, Pakistani television dramas do not simply provide entertainment but also serve as a powerful platform for shaping public debate on sensitive public issues such as gender roles, family relationships, societal expectations, etc. They set the stage for public discourse on vital topics such as gender roles, family dynamics, and social expectations (Baig & Khan, 2018; Happer & Philo, 2013). By framing these cultural and social issues, dramas don't just entertain—they spark debates and present new perspectives to the viewers (Akhtar, 2015; Gerbner et al., 1994). The role of dramas in shaping societal attitudes is undeniable, making them an essential medium for fostering progress and change in society (Rehman, 2021; Gerbner et al., 1994).

The role of media in framing social issues is well documented in media studies. Framing theory, developed by Erving Goffman (1974), posits that the way the media presents a story influences how audiences perceive and interpret it. The media selects certain aspects of reality, highlights them, and frames them in such a way as to guide public interpretation (Goffman, 1974). In the case of Pakistani dramas, this framing often involves the portrayal of deeply rooted cultural values and social norms. As Raza et al. (2023) point out, such images have a powerful impact on shaping public opinion, bringing topics that would otherwise be marginalized or taboo to the forefront of public debate.

The Pakistani drama *Mayi Ri* is an example of the use of this framing, particularly in its portrayal of child marriage, a pervasive issue in Pakistan, driven by cultural traditions that value family honor over individual happiness (Ijaz et al., 2022). These marriages are often non-consensual and have significant effects on girls' mental and emotional health, limiting their opportunities for education and personal development (Raza et al., 2023). Through the lens of framing theory, *Mayi Ri* not only tells a story but also provides a commentary on how societal expectations and traditions perpetuate harmful practices such as child marriage. By considering the issue in a broader societal context, the drama invites viewers to reflect on their own values and the cultural norms that shape family life. Furthermore, the drama like *Mayi Ri* point out, the depiction of such issues in media can help bring about social change by sparking public dialogue and raising awareness of these problems. The power of framing lies in its ability to present issues in



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ways that encourage critical reflection and promote empathy among viewers (Hussain & Niaz, 2020).

Despite a growing body of research on Pakistani television dramas and their social impact, insufficient attention has been paid to how specific framing practices affect public understanding of sensitive issues. This article seeks to address this gap by applying framing theory to Mayi Ri's media discourse analysis to examine how the drama's narrative structure shapes audience perceptions of child marriage, gender roles, and social norms. By analyzing the characters' experiences and the social pressures they face, this study aims to uncover how Mayi Ri frames the issue of child marriage and its wider implications for Pakistani society. Moreover, using the medium of 'Framing Theory,' our research is designed to bring certain implicit and explicit messages regarding patriarchal norms, gender roles and its effects on surrounding people into the limelight.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Media discourse studies, particularly through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), focus on how power dynamics and ideologies are embedded in media texts. CDA plays a pivotal role in revealing hidden biases and ideologies in media by examining the discourse used to represent different social groups. This approach is essential for understanding the social and political influence that media exerts on society through its discourse (Ramanathan & Hoon, 2015). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), also known as Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), is an interdisciplinary approach that examines how discourse reproduces power imbalances, including sexism, racism and social inequality. Unique to this approach is its focus on the connection between discourse and social structures through a sociocognitive framework, which links mental representations with the cognitive foundations of discourse. Power, in this context, is understood as control over discourse and, by extension, over people's thoughts (Van Dijk, 2015). The integration of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in media discourse studies has become prominent since the late 1990s. CDA is widely applied to reveal underlying ideologies in media, particularly focusing on how power dynamics are portrayed through discourse. By analyzing media discourse, CDA uncovers the social inequalities perpetuated through communication and examines the power structures that control public perception (Sari et al., 2018).

Framing theory refers to the process by which individuals interpret and develop opinions on issues based on how they are presented. It highlights how specific aspects of an issue are emphasized which can alter people's perceptions and attitudes. In a broader context, framing affects public opinion by influencing the weight individuals give to certain values or considerations. (Chong & Druckman, 2007). A framing effect occurs when a communicator places the emphasis on certain aspects of an issue and that influences how individuals perceive and prioritize those considerations in forming opinions. (Druckman, 2001). Framing theory serves as an effective lens for analyzing visual content, underscoring the significant impact of visuals on audience understanding (Coleman, 2009). In the age of Pakistani television dramas, framing plays a crucial role in shaping the presentation of cultural values, including both modern and traditional elements. The narratives presented frequently highlight modern values over traditional ones which influences viewers' perceptions and social norms. Television serves as a significant medium for introducing and negotiating cultural shifts, making it a powerful tool for social influence and education (Ashfaq, 2023).



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Pakistani television dramas are a medium for influencing social and cultural norms, often embedding ideological messages within the content. These dramas shape viewers' perceptions of values and behavior by presenting specific worldviews and promoting particular ideologies. Media producers use a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic elements, such as color schemes, language patterns and sound, to subtly convey these ideologies. This form of media discourse significantly impacts how viewers understand and adopt these ideologies (Ijaz et al., 2022). Social issues like inequality regarding gender, violence at home, mental health and much more influence the thoughts of the viewer through dramas. Mahmood (2023) asserts that these stories have entertainment values but can even trigger discussions that can bring a change. Naz and Mahmood (2015) pointed out that even though the Pakistani drama engages sensitive topics, it still permits many stereotypes, mainly the terms related to relationships with women. The attitude formed in society is closely connected with the media representation of sensitive themes. Television often provides a sense of companionship for individuals facing isolation by creating a sense of resonance with on-screen characters. Over time, drama content has evolved from family-centered narratives to more complex themes that mirror societal challenges, shaping how young viewers perceive family dynamics and broader social issues (Sherazi et al., 2022).

Child marriage is an unfavorable societal issue affecting multitudes of girls with having adverse effects on their health, well-being and education as well as economic dependency which results in poverty and inequality (Fan & Koski, 2021; Psaki, Melnikas, & Haque, 2019; Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021; Hossain, Abdulla, & Banik, 2021). Child marriage remains an adverse problem in Pakistan affecting 19 million girls with 1 in 6 young women married before the legal age of 18 which results in a severe impact on their health, education and socioeconomic status (UNICEF, 2019). Media represents these issues, particularly through dramas and the repercussions experienced by a child bride thereby drawing attention to the matter (Buchmann, Field, & Glennerster, 2020). These representations in media highlight the mental and emotional damage to young brides by framing them as victims of social and familial expectations (Rahiem, 2021) which not only addresses the unfavorable consequences but also emphasizes the importance of legal actions, women's empowerment and gender roles (McGavock, 2020). In Pakistan, the issue of forced marriages is prevalent. According to the study, gender inequalities, poverty, traditional and religious practices, and weak legislation cause forced marriages. (Myers & Harvey, 2011).

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

To bring awareness in Pakistani society regarding child marriage and its resulting impacts and to analyze the media's role in shaping public discourse to drive social change.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To analyze the framing techniques used in the drama *Mayi Ri* to depict sensitive societal issues.
2. To examine the impact of media framing on public discourse around child marriage in the context of the drama *Mayi Ri*.
3. To investigate how the narrative of *Mayi Ri* portrays character struggle which reflects broader societal issues.



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### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the framing techniques used in the drama Mayi Ri to reflect sensitive societal issues?
2. Why does media framing in Mayi Ri influence public discourse around child marriage?
3. How does the narrative of Mayi Ri reflect broader societal struggles?

### METHODOLOGY

#### RESEARCH DESIGN:

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine audience perceptions of the framing of child marriage in the Pakistani drama Mayi Ri. The data was collected through a structured Likert scale questionnaire.

#### DATA COLLECTION:

A questionnaire was designed with 15 close-ended Likert scale questions, focusing on various aspects of the drama's framing techniques, societal norms, and the impact on viewers' opinions. The questions were based on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The participants were asked to assess the effectiveness of the drama in portraying child marriage and its resolution.

#### SAMPLING

The study used convenience sampling, targeting 20-25 university students who had watched the drama Mayi Ri. This ensured the participants were sufficiently familiar with the show to provide meaningful responses.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework guides the focus of this study, which is based on the **Framing Theory** by Erving Goffman (1974). According to the framing concept, the media's treatment of information widely influences how audiences perceive and handle issues. The media constructs meaning by the technique of narrowing, intensifying, and leaving behind some aspects of reality that as a result, the public develops a distorted view of the issues under discussion (Entman, 1993).

Goffman (1974) had an original view of frames as tools of interpretation that people use to categorize and structure social events. Framing is the communication act that leads consumers to focus on the chosen characteristics of an issue while neglecting other elements (Chong & Druckman, 2007). It is this phenomenon that determines the hierarchy of values that individuals assign to particular social matters like the problem of child marriage.

The application of framing theory in the analysis of Mayi Ri allows for a more profound understanding of how narrative techniques, character development, and visual and sonic aspects are deployed to bring the issue of child marriage to the fore. The construal of the show as a reflection of the social conditions that promote child marriage is a good example. Through the display of the conflicts that the characters must face and the vulnerability of parents to mass societal pressures, the show provides a kind of glass through which the viewers see the social issues more resoundingly, as well as the gender issues, familial stereotypes, and traditional customs.



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This approach is also congruent with the concepts of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), an approach that studies the connection between language use and societal power structures. In CDA, the role of the media is discussed as a way of influencing cultural ideas. Thus, certain steps might have to be taken to either strengthen a specific idea or even change it (Van Dijk, 2015). The opportunity to change the nation for the better is presented by the story of child marriage in *Mayi Ri*. Through it, the viewers can identify and discuss with the filmmakers the existing socio-economic issues and patriarchal norms. The narrative also employs the device of framing to raise critical questions about the cultural practices being discussed.

*Mayi Ri* tells a story that is built on the repetition of a reality, that is the theme of the study that is done when the CDA is added to the concept of framing. Thus provides the reader with a clearer vision of how media language can have an impact on the public and create an environment of discussion for uncomfortable topics.

### ANALYSIS

This report presents the findings of a survey conducted to analyze the audience's perceptions of the drama *Mayi Ri* and its portrayal of the issue of child marriage. The survey responses were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The analysis focuses on how the drama raises awareness, influences perspectives, and challenges societal norms. To visually represent the data, pie charts have been included for each question, providing a clear depiction of the distribution of responses. This comprehensive analysis aims to highlight the drama's impact on viewers and its role in promoting social reflection and change.

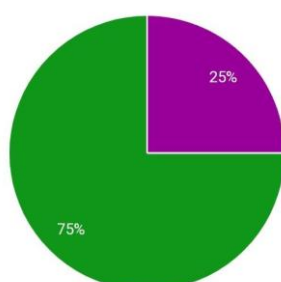
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

### Five-point Likert Scale:

**Question 1:** The drama *Mayi Ri* effectively portrays the issue of child marriage.

#### Analysis:

75% of respondents agreed with this statement, and 25% strongly agreed, making a total of 100% in favor. This highlights a unanimous acknowledgment of the drama's portrayal of child marriage. There were no neutral or disagreeing responses.



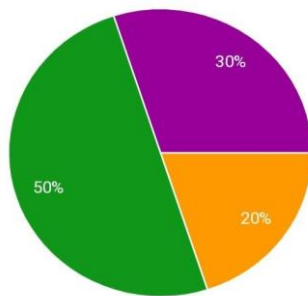


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**Question 2:** Watching Mayi Ri has increased my awareness of the consequences of child marriage.

**Analysis:**

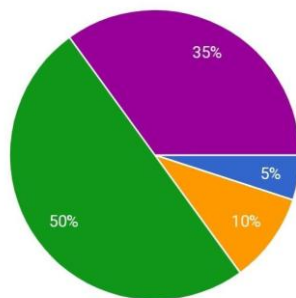
50% agreed, and 30% strongly agreed, while 20% remained neutral. This shows that 80% of viewers felt the drama increased their awareness, with a small portion (20%) taking no definitive stance. No disagreement was recorded.



**Question 3:** The drama accurately depicts the emotional and mental struggles faced by child brides.

**Analysis:**

50% agreed, and 35% strongly agreed, meaning 85% found the depiction accurate. Only 10% were neutral, and 5% strongly disagreed. This indicates that while the majority appreciated the portrayal, a small percentage questioned its accuracy.



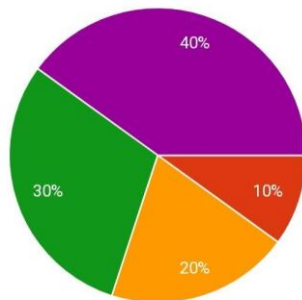
**Question 4:** The portrayal of family dynamics in the drama reflects real-life cultural expectations.

**Analysis:**

30% agreed, and 40% strongly agreed, indicating that 70% saw the family dynamics as culturally realistic. Meanwhile, 20% were neutral, and 10% disagreed, suggesting that some viewers may have found the depiction less relatable.

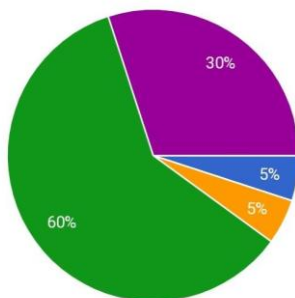


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**Question 5:** The drama challenges traditional societal norms that perpetuate child marriage.

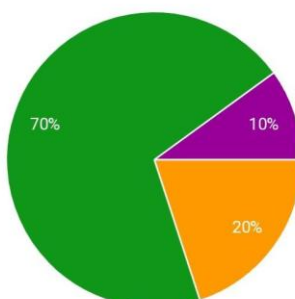
**Analysis:** 60% agreed, and 30% strongly agreed, making a total of 90% who felt the drama challenges harmful traditions. A small minority (5%) remained neutral or disagreed.



**Question 6:** Watching Mayi Ri has changed my perspective on child marriage.

**Analysis:**

70% agreed, and 10% strongly agreed, totaling 80% who experienced a perspective shift. However, 20% remained neutral, possibly indicating they were already aware of the issue or felt unaffected by the drama.



**Question 7:** The drama encourages viewers to critically reflect on harmful traditions and practices.

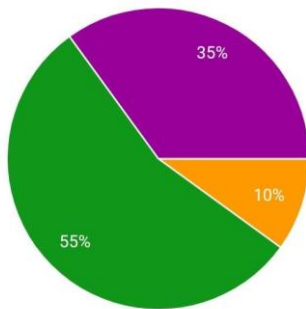
**Analysis:**



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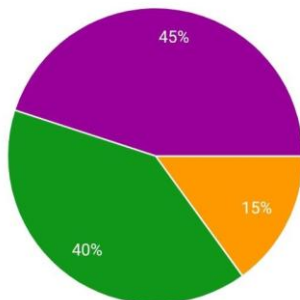
55% agreed, and 35% strongly agreed, meaning 90% felt the drama inspired critical reflection. Only 10% were neutral, with no disagreement noted.

**Question 8:** Mayi Ri inspires discussions about the need for social change in Pakistan.



### Analysis:

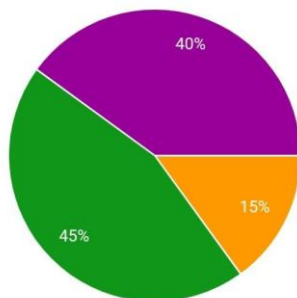
40% agreed, and 45% strongly agreed, making 85% of viewers see the drama as a catalyst for discussions on societal change. Neutral responses accounted for 15%, while no disagreement was recorded.



**Question 9:** Pakistani dramas like Mayi Ri are an effective medium for addressing sensitive social issues.

### Analysis:

45% agreed, and 40% strongly agreed, showing that 85% supported the idea of dramas as effective tools for social awareness. Around 15% remained neutral, with no dissenting responses.



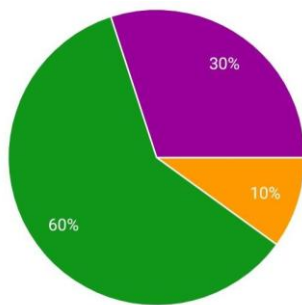


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**Question 10:** The framing of child marriage in Mayi Ri influences viewers' opinions on this practice.

**Analysis:**

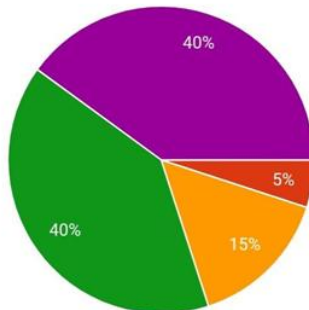
60% agreed, and 30% strongly agreed, making a total of 90% who felt their opinions were influenced by the drama. The remaining 10% were neutral, with no disagreement noted.



**Question 11:** The drama Mayi Ri portrays a realistic and positive resolution to the issue of child marriage.

**Analysis:**

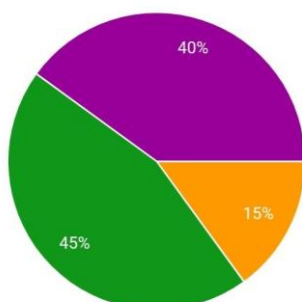
40% agreed, and 40% strongly agreed, indicating that 80% felt the resolution was realistic and positive. Around 15% were neutral, and a small 5% disagreed.



**Question 12:** The characters' pursuit of education after their divorce inspires viewers to prioritize personal growth over societal pressures.

**Analysis:**

45% agreed, and 40% strongly agreed, meaning 85% found the characters' choices inspiring. The remaining 15% were neutral, with no disagreement.





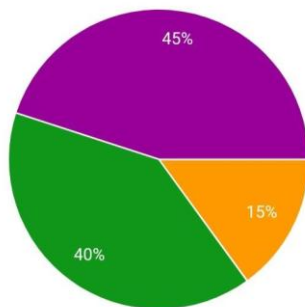
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**Question 13:** The separation and mutual respect between the couple in Mayi Ri challenge societal expectations about forced marriages.

**Analysis:**

40% agreed, and 45% strongly agreed, totaling 85% who viewed the resolution as progressive. Around 15% remained neutral, while no disagreement was noted.

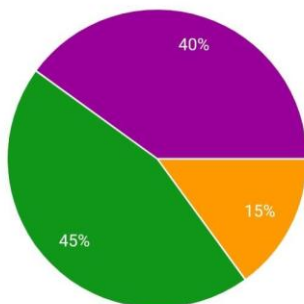
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**Question 14:** The portrayal of co-parenting in Mayi Ri reflects a progressive approach to family dynamics in traditional societies.

**Analysis:**

45% agreed, and 40% strongly agreed, showing that 85% found co-parenting to be a progressive theme. A small 15% were neutral, with no disagreements.

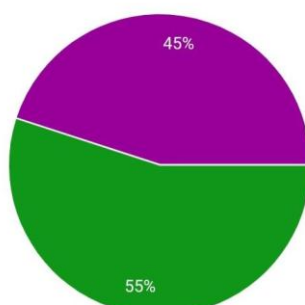


**Question 15:** The ending of Mayi Ri encourages viewers to rethink the long-term consequences of child marriage.

**Analysis:**

55% agreed, and 45% strongly agreed, meaning 100% of respondents felt the ending was impactful and thought-provoking.

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## **FINDINGS**

### **a) Raising Awareness**

Mayi Ri effectively shed light on the critical issue of child marriage, a deeply ingrained social problem. Many respondents acknowledged that the drama heightened their awareness and prompted critical reflection on this sensitive topic. By portraying the harsh realities and consequences of early marriages, the show succeeded in engaging viewers in a meaningful discourse, fostering empathy and understanding.

### **b) Cultural Relevance**

The drama's depiction of family dynamics and societal pressures resonated deeply with a significant portion of the audience. Many viewers could relate to the struggles faced by the characters, finding parallels in their own cultural and familial experiences. However, a small percentage found the scenarios less relatable, possibly due to varying personal or regional contexts. Nonetheless, the narrative effectively captured the essence of societal challenges faced by many.

### **c) Challenging Norms**

The resolution of Mayi Ri was widely praised for its progressive themes, such as the importance of education, co-parenting, and mutual respect in relationships. These elements not only provided a refreshing perspective but also challenged deeply rooted societal norms. The drama encouraged viewers to question traditional practices and envision healthier, more equitable ways of living, marking a significant step toward social change.

### **d) Media's Role**

The findings emphasize the transformative potential of Pakistani dramas like Mayi Ri. By addressing sensitive social issues, these dramas inspire critical dialogue and promote awareness. The show's success demonstrates how media can be a powerful catalyst for change, encouraging communities to reflect on pressing societal problems and take steps toward reform.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study highlights the powerful role of Pakistani dramas, particularly Mayi Ri, in framing sensitive societal issues such as child marriage. Through the application of Framing Theory, it is evident that Mayi Ri not only portrays the harsh realities of child marriage but also sparks critical reflection among viewers on the cultural and societal pressures that perpetuate such practices. The drama's depiction of the emotional and mental struggles of child brides, along with its portrayal of family dynamics and the resolution of these issues, resonates deeply with audiences, encouraging them to challenge traditional norms and consider more progressive alternatives.



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The findings reveal that *Mayi Ri* effectively raises awareness about the detrimental effects of child marriage, with a significant portion of the audience acknowledging a shift in perspective after watching the drama. By focusing on themes like education, mutual respect, and co-parenting, the drama offers a progressive approach to family dynamics and societal expectations, encouraging viewers to question harmful traditions and think critically about the long-term consequences of forced marriages.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the role of media in influencing public discourse and promoting social change. The overwhelming support for the idea that *Mayi Ri* has contributed to conversations about child marriage and the need for societal reform underscores the potential of television dramas as tools for social transformation. By providing a platform to address issues like gender inequality and forced marriage, *Mayi Ri* demonstrates how media can challenge ingrained cultural practices and contribute to shaping a more equitable society.

In conclusion, this research underscores the importance of framing in media discourse and its ability to influence public opinion. Through its compelling narrative, *Mayi Ri* has proven to be an effective medium for raising awareness and inspiring critical dialogue about pressing social issues in Pakistan, particularly the harmful practice of child marriage. The study suggests that media, when used thoughtfully, can serve as a powerful agent for change, fostering a deeper understanding of societal challenges and encouraging viewers to actively engage in conversations aimed at reforming harmful practices.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCHERS

The data analysis and findings in the research suggest several implications for the future, particularly regarding media's role in influencing social change and shaping public discourse. The drama "*Mayi Ri*" effectively highlights child marriage and its consequences, showcasing how media can be a tool for raising awareness about sensitive issues. The framing of the narrative encourages viewers to critically reflect on harmful cultural practices and societal norms. Future researchers can further use media to challenge entrenched traditions and foster progressive thinking. The portrayal of character struggles and family dynamics resonates with the audience, influencing perceptions of child marriage and societal expectations. By framing such issues within relatable cultural contexts, dramas can continue to shape public discourse, promote dialogue, and inspire action against social injustices. Showcasing positive outcomes like education and co-parenting in challenging circumstances can inspire individuals to prioritize personal growth over societal pressures.

Moreover, future researchers can build on this framework to explore other pressing social issues, such as gender inequality, mental health, and domestic violence, further leveraging media for educational purposes. Future dramas can incorporate more diverse perspectives to ensure broader relatability and representation of varied regional and cultural experiences. Further research could explore the long-term impact of such media on changing societal attitudes and behavior. On a final note, the findings highlight the transformative potential of dramas like "*Mayi Ri*" to serve as platforms for awareness, empathy, and social change, setting a foundation for future initiatives in media, policy, and research.



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