



ISSN: 2146-1961

Güroca, T. (2023). The Representation of Lifestyles and Consumption Culture in Television Dramas: "Gossip Girl" Series, *International Journal of Eurasia Social Sciences (IJOESS)*, 14(52), 745-765.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.35826/ijoess.3220>

Article Type (Makale Türü): Araştırma Makalesi

## THE REPRESENTATION OF LIFESTYLES AND CONSUMPTION CULTURE IN TELEVISION DRAMAS: "GOSSIP GIRL" SERIES\*

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Received: 16.11.2022

Accepted: 18.05.2022

Published: 01.06.2023

### ABSTRACT

The research examines the lifestyle and consumption phenomena presented through the media and television. Based on Neil Postman's (2022) two different approaches based on the dystopias presented to the reader in the novels "1984" and "Brave New World", the research suggests that Huxley's novel finds more practice in the contemporary world. In this direction, it was deemed appropriate to examine the media contents, which are the dominant force in the spread of consumer culture and lifestyles and the dominant ideology. The experiences presented in the television series not only enable young people to adapt to the consumer culture but also bring the concept of lifestyle to the fore and make young people a part of the consumption society. In this study, which aims to reveal how globalized consumption culture is tried to be disseminated by examining the lifestyle and consumption phenomena presented in television series, the series "Gossip Girl" was determined as the universe. Content analysis was used as a data collection technique, and a situation determination was tried to be made. Eight categories were determined to examine the lifestyles and consumption activities of the nine main characters. Content analysis was used as a data collection technique, and a situation determination was tried to be made. Eight different categories were determined to examine the lifestyles and consumption activities of the nine main characters in the four episodes of the series included in the study sample. According to the results obtained from the data, the series' producers present the consumption to the audience in an implicit way with indirect narrations instead of showing the characters while shopping. In this way, possible reactions of the audience are restrained as much as possible. In addition, the research has shown that the phenomenon of lifestyles has ceased to be the privilege of a particular group today and has taken a form that influences society. Consumption and lifestyles have become independent of time and location, dominating all parts of life. This situation, which was realized thanks to technological developments, was also supported by the content analysis method carried out in the study.

**Keywords:** Gossip Girl, lifestyle, consumption, TV drama, TV series.

\* This article was produced from the master thesis titled "Content Analysis of the Presentation of Consumption and Lifestyle Cases in the Example of 'Gossip Girl' Series" prepared under the supervision of Asst. Prof. Yaprak İŞÇİBAŞI at Anadolu University Institute of Social Sciences, Cinema and Television Master Program.

## INTRODUCTION

Neil Postman (2022), referring to the novels "1984" (Orwell, 2016) and "Brave New World" (Huxley, 2016), says that there are two ways, Orwellian and Huxleyian, of consuming the spirit of a culture. On the Orwellian path, the oppressive practices of "Big Brother" lead the world to become a prison. "Big Brother", who always follows everyone, blacklists them, and sometimes even destroys them, is trying to subdue people by banning books, leaving people without information, hiding the truth, and turning humanity into a captive culture. On the Huxleyian path, there is no need for "Big Brother." Although it has a totalitarian regime like "1984", in this dystopia, books are not banned because there is no one left to read, and there is no need to leave them without information or hide the truth, as people are drowned in the information bombard they are exposed to and dragged into passivity and egoism. In "Brave New World", those controlled because of the pain and coercion of "1984" are replaced by those controlled with pleasure. People are ruined not by what they hate and are forced to do but by what they love and enjoy doing. There is no need to ban books because people who drown in drugs and sexual intercourse are not looking for books in the sea of pleasure.

According to Althusser (2006), repressive state apparatuses have been developed similar to Orwell's "1984". These repressive apparatuses aim to unleash the surplus value in the working class and incorporate it into the capitalist order of 'exploitation' and to consolidate the domination of the ruling class, the class that holds the means of production and large landed estates, over the working class. However, it accomplishes this through two instruments. The first is the state's repressive apparatuses, which ensure their reproduction, including physical repression when necessary, and use the dominant ideology to this end. In addition to the repressive state apparatuses, which can be called 'Big Brother', Althusser introduced the ideological state apparatuses. Beyond physical repression, these apparatuses reproduce the existing ideology by presenting values through symbolic expression. Among these apparatuses, the most effective one is undoubtedly the communication apparatus due to the impact of developing technology. Thanks to the mass media, which has transformed the world into a "global village (McLuhan, 1962; 1994)", the ideological apparatuses of the state, dominated by symbolic expression, have begun to replace the repressive apparatuses, dominated by physical coercion. Today's society is pacified through entertainment, thus becoming apolitical and indifferent to social problems. The endless hunger for entertainment is transformed into pleasure and controlled by drowning in this sea of pleasure.

The dominant ideology propagates that real life is in leisure time outside working hours to increase its hegemony and control over the working class. Occupying leisure time through the culture industry offers people an escape from the responsibilities and routines of work life. In fact, by doing so, it strengthens the spine of this world that people are trying to get rid of (Dağtaş & Dağtaş, 2006, p. 17). Even in their free time, consumers have to orient themselves according to the unity of production (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2012). Leisure time is provided in the form of a consumer culture that legalizes the boring working conditions of capitalism and allows the employees to obey the system to maintain its effectiveness of the system (Aydoğan, 2000, p. 179). In this way, activities are organized as leisure activities fall within the scope of the capitalist

market. Entertainment is designed to fill free time, become a market, and start to create its own industries. According to Baudrillard (2017), the relationship between entertainment and leisure time is not a function of pleasure, satisfaction, and functional leisure activities. The definition of entertainment is the same as non-productive consumption, and leisure or recreational activities are not done because people enjoy them but to increase their social status or consolidate their existence in their current position.

From the perspective of Postman, this is a process that needs to be captured and consciously directed. At this point, the dominant ideology has democratized consumption, seizing the free time from which the working people benefit and ensuring the continuity of its hegemony over them. In modern societies, consumption is expressed as an activity that determines social status and identities, apart from the definitions for meeting the human needs of the past (Üstün & Tural, 2008, pp. 262-263; Warde, 1991). It has now become a part of the social system, and people have long left the stage of deciding on their own what to consume. Now consumers are taught what they need and how (Illich, 2000, p. 55). Today, consumption has gained a new dimension beyond concrete objects, including abstract and symbolic expression.

In this new consumption phenomenon, the act of consumption goes beyond the act of shopping, which aims to meet only vital needs, and becomes accustomed to the state of relations that contain different meanings and values. The answers to questions about what people do, what they think, or who they are; it is now known by the answers people give to the questions of what and how much they consume, what brands they wear, and where they shop from, known and gaining value or not (Duman, 2006, p. 18). Thanks to lifestyles, which serve as “soma”, the reproduction of labor is ensured, and the masses are not conscious of the political and economic conditions. In this way, the existing political power continues to exist, and the economic structure, which forms the basis of the legitimacy of the power, finds the opportunity to reproduce itself.

One of the functions of the concept of the culture industry, which Adorno and Horkheimer (1996, p. 15) use to emphasize the commodification of the cultural forms of the entertainment industry, is to produce the dependent individual and the mass necessary for the survival of the system, as well as producing cultural commodities. In other words, the culture industry produces commodities as much as entertainment, music, movies, pleasure, desire, and demand; it also produces the individuals and the masses who need them, “it manages and directs the masses ideologically (Erdoğan & Alemdar, 2002, p. 415)”. Culture does not rise from the masses or below; on the contrary, it becomes a situation managed from above (Koluçak, 2017, p. 128). In line with this orientation, individuals are motivated and adopt unnecessary consumption patterns; thus, a mass that can be manipulated and called a consumption society emerges with the increase in their commitment to the system (Featherstone, 2007, p. 38).

According to the dictates of the social control system, which is defined as the consumption ideology, spending, pleasure, and accountability replace the puritanical themes of savings, work, and wealth in the consumer society. As the state increases its pressures as an institution of ideology, the current ideology pushes consumption to the forefront as a revolt against itself. Like Featherstone’s statement, “to be able to mass

produce, and therefore consume, requires the existence of a society suitable for this”, on the other hand, consumer culture is a culture in which “most of the consumers desire, even pursue, acquire and exhibit the products and services that stand out with their non-utilitarian status-seeking, arousing interest, and novelty seeking (Odabaşı, 1999, p. 21)”. People consume more than they produce, and in this culture, they judge themselves and others by their lifestyles (Rassuli & Hallander, 1986, pp. 6-7).

In the postmodern period, while consumption patterns are formed, people leave their place in the hierarchy. They aim to experience the lifestyles and consumption patterns of upper social status groups, but instead of imitating this lifestyle, it creates its style by combining it with its values. Consumption society, starting from the insatiable nature of need, gives commodities an image-containing character, presents them in the world of signs, and enables them to create symbolic values. By spreading fashion to large masses and shortening its validity period, influence and motivation are created in consumers because of manipulations on time, place, and taste (Karakaş, 2001, p. 271). In particular, the urban individual consumes to create a sense of identity and indicate whom they wish to be perceived as. When people create a clothing style to differentiate themselves from others, others must understand this style. Therefore, individuals can come to different positions as long as they share common cultural symbols with others.

From one’s body to clothes, from speech to leisure use, from food and beverage preferences to holiday and automobile choices, lifestyles become a means of self-expression for the consumer (Featherstone, 2007). Lifestyles can be defined as how to live with a person; It helps to know how people live and spend their time (Mowen, 1993, p. 236). The concept of lifestyle, first used by Max Weber to describe the differences and statuses between social groups, has become one of the basic building blocks of consumer culture today. Davidson (1992, p. 66) interprets this situation as lifestyles becoming commodities.

The concept of lifestyle is how things, places, and times belong to a group, attitude, or form depending on cultural structures (Chaney, 1996, p. 5). It has comprehensive content covering almost every aspect of daily life, such as the values of the individual, where they live, and what they eat and drink. It reflects the interests and ideas of the individual and the fields of activity, including leisure activities (Wilkie, 1994, p. 334). Lifestyle is a similar consumption model of consumers with values and tastes (Solomon, 1996, p. 658) or a way of life that includes how people spend their free time, what they care about around them, and their thoughts about the world and themselves (İslamoğlu, 2003, p. 148). The concept represents the individuality and difference of the individual, and it also includes groups with a common consumption style. Such groups are called lifestyle groups, and individuals in these groups may belong to different social classes (Leiss, Kline, & Shally, 1990, p. 304). The fact that lifestyles are primarily seen in cities and metropolises where consumption is most intense is since they are the focal point of life in civilized societies (Chaney, 1996, p. 5).

Media and television, one of the most important transmitters of the dominant ideology, viewers are seen as potential consumers. They are encouraged to consume not only through advertisements but also through all types of television programs, especially movies, and serials. Scenes of commercial products and personalities

are presented in media products, physical and social environments are prepared, and the audience is directed to consumption through imaginary environments. The repetitive presentation of ideological elements by the rulers determines how people make sense of even the most essential features of their society through images because the dominant ideology appropriately presents its assumptions to the audience and synthesizes them through the media. At this stage, television is a tool of the established order. There is an instrumentality in reinforcing and maintaining things rather than changing them (Lull, 2001, pp. 25-26).

At this point, Hall (1999, p. 120) mentions the Huxleyian and Orwellian differences, similar to Postman. According to him, dominant ideologies reflect the values of politically and economically powerful institutions and individuals by influencing media content. In authoritarian regimes, on the other hand, members of power aiming to maintain their control limit access to information and communication. As a result of the Huxleyian view, which is dominant, especially in Western societies today, individuals try to put the consumption and lifestyle facts presented in these worlds into real life to have the impression that they can live in artificial worlds, especially on television. Television series and movies are the genres in which these worlds are mainly created. This industry in American hegemony has a structure that aims to spread the dominant culture and ideology. Over time, ideological messages exposed through mass media are internalized and become ordinary in routine social relations. These ideological representations are comprehended, interpreted, created, and used in the audience's daily lives. Movies and TV series play a prominent role in the daily routine communication acts of adults and cartoons in children. People unintentionally help this ideology spread and reproduce by popularizing the ideas and values acquired through the media.

In this order, of which television series are one of the representatives, consumption is presented as a necessity for people to be themselves, while individuals are warned about the wounds that not consuming will cause in their souls. Through these representations, the audience enters into a fairy tale, loses their perception of reality in a pacified position for a while, and therefore perceives what they are watching as reality (Cantaş & Serarslan, 2021, p. 638). Thus, with the lifestyles offered, the way for consumption has been paved, and people are taught that they can gain selves and be different from others to the extent they consume. In these TV series, where being happy becomes equivalent to consuming material and spiritual values, the devalued individual gains value if they consume it. The audience is similarly made to feel worthless and is drawn into the illusion that they will be degraded if they do not consume.

For this reason, by adapting the lifestyles in the TV series to their own lives, they both feel a sense of belonging and adopt the necessity of consumption through the production of lifestyles. In this process, the shows try to create this illusion by using cultural values and judgments. Therefore, American culture and, more specifically, consumption culture patterns meet the audience through these productions and replace the audience's value judgments.

The lifestyles that are tried to be assimilated with these productions have an influential position on society in developing countries such as Turkey and are open to foreign influences as much as possible. TSociety accepts

the values presented in the series over time. Because of this acceptance, domestic TV series producers place these values in TV dramas and increase their visibility due to the values accepted by society. Moreover, perform the task of communication apparatus of the American ideology by recreating these values, even if they do not belong to that ideology.

The number of local and foreign TV series has reached very high after the increase in television channels and video streaming platforms. The habit of broadcasting foreign series in the original language with Turkish subtitles, starting with CNBC-e<sup>1</sup>, has been adopted by other channels, such as TNT, over time. With the spread of video streaming platforms, the productions have the feature of watching the shows with voiceovers or subtitles, so the audience can watch the series in the language they want. Today, although video streaming platforms work with local producers to increase their visibility in the region they broadcast, American productions have dominated the broadcast content of all of them. It spreads the fictional world of American ideology to the whole world by bringing American culture and values together with the audience.

In particular, the majority of the TV series broadcast by CNBE-e were made up of productions representing the American dream. TV series such as "Desperate Housewives", "90210", "Gossip Girl", "The O.C.", "Gilmore Girls", and "Chuck" are among the elements of American expansionism. Among these productions, especially the "Gossip Girl" series, created its fan base in Turkey, adopted the lifestyles it offered, and put its consumption patterns into practice. This order represented by "Gossip Girl" includes a life provided by interest groups that also hold power worldwide, and consumption is at the forefront of this life. While consumption is presented as a necessity for people to be themselves, individuals are warned about the wounds that not consuming will cause in their souls. With the lifestyles offered, the way for consumption is paved, and people are made to adapt themselves to the extent that they consume and that they can be different from others to the extent that they consume. In these series, where being happy becomes equivalent to consuming material and spiritual values, the devalued individual gains value if they consume it. The audience is similarly made to feel worthless and is drawn into the illusion that they will be degraded if they do not consume. For this reason, by adapting the lifestyles in the TV series to their own lives, they both feel a sense of belonging and adopt the necessity of consumption through the production of lifestyles.

### **Problem**

In this process, the productions try to create this illusion by using cultural values and judgments. Especially the methods used in dramas; are applied in the Gossip Girl series for reasons arising from its subject and plot. Therefore, the patterns of American culture and, more specifically, consumption culture meet the audience

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<sup>1</sup> CNBE-e was established in 2000 as a partnership between CNBC International and Doğuş Broadcasting Group. It was sold to Discovery Communications in 2015 and ceased broadcasting in the same year. CNBC-e divided its broadcasts into daytime and evening segments. In the daytime, CNBC-e provided real-time access to finance, economics, and market information; in the evening, it became a TV series and entertainment channel. In cooperation with global giants such as NBC, ABC, HBO, WB, MGM, Paramount, Buena Vista, Sony Columbia, FOX, Sony Columbia, Sony Columbia, and FOX, CNBC-e brought to the screen award-winning TV series and movies by world-renowned directors, sometimes in the original language with subtitles and sometimes with Turkish dubbing.

through this series and replace the audience's value judgments. In line with these reasons, how lifestyles and consumption phenomena are presented in the Gossip Girl series constitutes the main problem of this study.

### **Aim**

This study aims to reveal how the globalized consumption culture is disseminated in television series by examining the lifestyle and consumption phenomena presented in the TV drama "Gossip Girl".

For this purpose, answers to the following questions will be sought in the study:

- Is there a relationship between the demographic and socio-economic status of the main characters in the series and consumption?
- How is the working time/leisure usage in the series, and what are the leisure activities?
- What is the use and frequency of venues in the series? For what purposes are the locations used?
- What are the shopping activities of the series' main characters?
- What are the product and service consumptions of the series' main characters?
- What is the frequency of changing clothes of the series' main characters in the episode?
- What is the use of technological products by the series' main characters?
- How is the transportation of the series' main characters?

### **Significance**

It is an accepted approach that mass media, especially television, is one of the influential factors in shaping societies' behavior. The role of television in the spread of consumer culture is undeniable. Considering the encouraging effect of television productions, the factors used in the TV series "Gossip Girl" while directing the audience to behavior change in line with their goals gain importance. This research has tried to show how these factors are used with the content analysis method that tries to apply to the "Gossip Girl" series. In light of the results obtained, although no generalization can be made about the television series, it gives an idea about how the operation is. In addition, research on the relationship between consumption and television has focused chiefly on advertising generations or their effects on audience behavior. On the other hand, research on the contents of programs broadcast on television mostly chooses the types of programs in which brand names are presented in the form of hidden advertisements, such as competition programs. This study is essential in revealing the consumption habits of the characters in the TV series.

### **METHOD**

#### **Research Model**

This study aims to reveal the consumption patterns in youth TV series and is planned as quantitative research. For this purpose, coding forms suitable for the content analysis method were prepared and applied to the selected sample. Content analysis is a research technique that systematically processes communication content

within predetermined classifications. Contents can be newspaper news or articles and all kinds of content transmitted by mass media, such as television news, radio programs, and movies (Geray, 2006, p. 147). According to Bernard Berenson, content analysis is “a research technique that provides unbiased, systematic quantitative descriptions of the disclosed content of communication (Aziz 2011: 131)”. It is a method that investigates social reality by making inferences about the non-specific features of the content from the features of the salient contents of the social reality (Merten, 1983, p. 15). It tries to understand the dimensions that do not exist, that is, not directly observable, based on the existing text, in a logical way, by deduction. The analysis content is designed for coding as data to be associated with the research questions (Berg, Lune, & Aydın, 2015, pp. 380-381).

### **Universe and Sample**

In this study, which examines consumption and lifestyle presentations, television series were determined as the unit of analysis. The “Gossip Girl” series, which was broadcast on “The CW Television Network” between 2007-2012 for six seasons and 121 episodes (The CW Television Network, 01.11.2022), is chosen as the universe of the study. One of the main reasons for the determination of this series is that it ranks high among the TV series preferred, especially among young people in the United States and Turkey. The series was adapted in different countries, and the Turkish version was shot in Turkey for two seasons under the name “Little Secrets”. Another reason “Gossip Girl” was chosen is because the show created a unique fashion. Each character in the series has become a fashion icon among young people, bringing with it a market where the clothes or accessories used in the series are sold (NTVMSNBC, 15.10.2009). Lifestyles identified with the names of the characters in the series (Power, 25.09.2010; NTV, 24.12.2008; NTV, 24.12.2008); It creates significant changes in the lifestyles of the audience and individuals who identify with the characters, both in terms of clothing and life philosophy. This situation, which is especially accepted among young people, has become influential not only as a fashion trend but also as a lifestyle.

A stratified sampling method is used while determining the sample in the study. Seasons were considered as a stratum, and a sample was determined by random selection from each stratum. Seasons 1 and 2 are included in deciding the layers, and the other seasons are excluded since it is impossible to analyze 121 episodes broadcast in 6 seasons due to time constraints. Sampling, two episodes from the first two seasons were selected by simple random sampling method and analyzed by content analysis method. The sample has been determined as episodes 1 and 4 of the first season and episodes 10 and 24 of the second.

### **Data Collection Tools**

To determine the presentation of consumption and lifestyle phenomena in the TV series “Gossip Girl”, the researcher pre-examined all episodes of the 121-episode series. Variables and coding forms were defined for the content analysis coding form. While the coding forms were being prepared, the researcher determined the basic categories of the elements that determine the consumption and lifestyles in the series. These eight

categories were created by considering the defining characteristics of the consumption phenomenon and lifestyles presented in the series. These categories are living district, time use, leisure activities, location, product and service consumption, clothing, communication tools, and vehicle use. Then, operational definitions were determined by grouping them within categories.

## FINDINGS

### Gossip Girl TV Series

The series is based on the novel series "Gossip Girl" by Cecily von Ziegesar.

Series Creators: Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage

The show centers on the scandalous lives of attractive, privileged, and very affluent teens who reside in Manhattan's Upper East Side and how they betray one another while being constantly observed by a vicious but well-known blogger.

**Table 1.** Numbers of Seasons and Episodes

Season	Episode	Total
Season 1	18 episodes	121 episodes
Season 2	25 episodes	
Season 3	22 episodes	
Season 4	22 episodes	
Season 5	24 episodes	
Season 6	10 episodes	

**Table 2.** Directors, Authors, Publication Dates, and Names of the Episodes in the Sample

Episode	Director	Writes	Release date	Name of the episode
Season 1 episode 1	Mark Piznarski	Josh Schwartz, Stephanie Savage, Cecily von Ziegesar	19 Sep. 2007	Pilot
Season 1 episode 4	Patrick R. Norris	Josh Schwartz, Joshua Safran, Stephanie Savage	10 Oct. 2007	Bad News Blair
Season 2 episode 10	David Von Ancken	Josh Schwartz, Stephanie Savage, Jessica Queller	10 Nov. 2008	Bonfire of the Vanity
Season 2 episode 24	Mark Piznarski	Josh Schwartz, Stephanie Savage	11 May 2009	Valley Girls

**Table 3.** Characters and Actors whose Consumption Habits and Lifestyles are Analyzed

Character	Actor
Serena van der Woodsen	Blake Lively
Dan Humphrey	Penn Badgley
Blair Waldorf	Leighton Meester
Nate Archibald	Chace Crawford
Chuck Bass	Ed Westwick
Jenny Humphrey	Taylor Momsen
Vanessa Abrams	Jessica Szohr
Lily van der Woodsen	Kelly Rutherford
Rufus Humphrey	Matthew Settle

### Demographic Characteristics of the Main Characters in the Series

The main character in the series, except Lily and Rufus, are legally underage. However, it is seen that the characters do not have any problems because of their young age anywhere in the series. Although the legal age limit for alcohol consumption in New York City is 21, this situation is not emphasized or even ignored in the series; All characters can consume alcohol without any hindrance. Since the youthful characters in the TV series are under the tutelage of their families, being able to continue their livelihood is not among their main problems.

The neighborhoods where the characters in the series live are grouped under two headings. The first is the Upper East Side on Manhattan Island, and the second is Williamsburg in Brooklyn. Five of the nine main characters live in the Upper East Side, while four other characters live in Williamsburg.

“Constance Billard School for Girls” and “St. Jude’s School for Boys” are fictional schools created for the show. These schools provide education in the same building. These schools, which provide education on the Upper East Side, are known as one of the best private high schools in New York. Rufus Humphrey has difficulties getting his children Dan and Jenny to attend these schools because Rufus can barely afford to pay for the schools with his art gallery business. For this reason, Rufus will first turn the art gallery into a cafe gallery and then sell it so Dan can study at Yale. On the other hand, Vanessa is Dan’s childhood friend, but she does not attend school due to her family’s thoughts about the education system and financial difficulties. However, she is preparing for exams to complete high school externally.

New York University was the university attended by the main characters. Dan cannot attend Yale University due to his family’s economic conditions and decides on New York University. On the other hand, Blair has the financial opportunity to go to any university she wants but has to register for a state university due to a punishment given by his family. Serena takes a break from her studies for a year after graduating high school because she cannot decide what she wants. Nate starts an internship with a politician and does not consider college an option. After his father’s death, Chuck Bass became an investor just like his father. He operates as a freelance entrepreneur and does not care about attending university. Vanessa is entitled to study at the university by taking exams after graduating from open high school.

In professions, only the characters Rufus and Lily work full-time. Although both characters work and cater to their families' needs, their difference is striking. Rufus, who lives in Brooklyn, runs his own art gallery. He runs the work by himself. On the other hand, Lily is hardly ever shown to be working, although she is simultaneously the ultimate controlling shareholder of “Rhodes Industries” and the CEO of “Bass Industries” following the death of Chuck’s father, Bart Bass. Lily, who is already a millionaire due to her family, is not actually working, although she seems to be working.

Other characters, Dan, Jenny, and Vanessa, work with financial concerns. Dan works to meet his school expenses or needs, and Vanessa works to survive. Considering that both characters are middle-class individuals

living in Brooklyn, it is clear what the show wants to say. It is needed to work to move up to a higher class, and it is required to spend this money by earning money beyond working. Because the material opportunities no longer classify individuals, they have but by how much they include these material opportunities in their consumption activity. Jenny is engaged in fashion design. She sews custom clothes for a fee and is also interning with Blair's mother, Eleanor Walldorf.

Serena's working life consists of modeling, and she does this to appear in magazines and make herself known beyond making money. The goal is seen as a tool to provide social status beyond work. Nate starts to have a love affair with one of the wealthiest women in the city when he is in financial trouble after his father's bankruptcy, and then he earns money in return for this relationship. Chuck takes his place in business life to prove himself to his father. Rather than making money, he is trying to prove that he can achieve something and is not as screwed as his father thinks. Serena, Nate, and Chuck are wealthy characters living in Manhattan. Their work life has other goals beyond the material purpose. For them, work is more than a necessity for survival; it is a tool used to gain a place in society.

#### **Comparison of Life Times, School/Work Times, and Leisure Time in the Series**

In season 1, episode 1, it is seen that there is 81.3% free time. The vast majority of the episode is based on leisure activities. The times that people need to use to meet their primary needs are examined under the life time sub-variable, and it is seen that their life time is 5'56" and 14.2%. The times when they work to meet their life needs or receive an education by ensuring that they can continue their livelihood in the future are called school/working time. School/work time, which takes up only 5.2% of the department, remains at a meager value compared to leisure time.

Contrary to season 1 episode 1, season 1 episode 4 is relatively close between school/work time and leisure time. Leisure time dominates the series with 56.3%, while school/work time increases to 36.3%. Serena and Blair's selection and modeling of Eleanor Walldorf's designs for fashion shoots are a big part of this rise. Although both see this business as entertainment, they must take it seriously as they will be in a fashion catalog. They are involved in catalogs shooting for free, as it will support their popularity in society. On the other hand, life time takes up very little space in the episode with a rate of 3.3%.

Season 2, episode 10 has a much more equal distribution than the other episodes. The Brooklyn characters perform almost all the school/study time in the episode. While researching an article to be published in a newspaper, Jenny turns to a consulting firm to market her designs. Both Dan and Jenny, unlike Serena and Blair, do this not solely for their societal position but to increase their professional success. The pleasure and social respect that will bring along with professional success are based on the material concerns they aim for with their work since they are not their primary priority. That is related to the fact that they both come from middle-class families. However, the most crucial difference that separates Jenny from Dan is an increase in status that may occur after Jenny's success will increase her reputation in the environment she is in or is trying

to be in. That will make it easier for him to be accepted into the society he always wanted to be a part of. For Jenny, this secondary priority sometimes precedes immediate financial concerns. That causes work to be a means of obtaining the requirements to enter a higher class rather than managing one's life.

In season 2, episode 24, where flashbacks are frequently used, leisure time has the advantage of 83%. In the episode based on Lily and Serena, the fact that both characters come from the wealthiest family in Manhattan is the biggest reason for not having school/work time in the episode. Due to the arguments that both of them had with their mothers, they were at odds with their mothers. Lily runs away from home and settles in with her sister. When her mother refuses to send money, she has no income. Although Lily's older sister is working, she is never shown working in the episode. Life time in the episode is 10.6% with 4'29" minutes. These parts are centered around Lily and Serena, consisting of Serena's time in prison and Lily's arguments with her family, both at present and in flashbacks.

### **Leisure Activities Performed in the Series**

When the leisure activities carried out in season 1, episode 4 are examined, it is seen that the activities carried out under socialization are in the first place. Socialization activities have a place of 59% among leisure activities and 49.1% in the whole series. Sex, the second leisure time activity, is shown for 5'27" seconds, followed by entertainment activities for 3'17". In 5.2% of the series, the characters use a communication device, especially the telephone. The shopping and sports activities in the series are shown only once. The most crucial point about the shopping event is that the event is not born out of a vital need. Serena is down on her quarrel with Blair and wants to fix it by shopping. Nate organizes the sporting event, but it is not only a sporting event; it results in Nate's conversation with his father and acting in line with the instructions he receives from him.

Season 1, episode 4 is where socialization activities take first place. Socialization activities rank first with 22.8% compared to the series, followed by entertainment activities for 4'17" and communication tool usage for 4'9" seconds. The other three activities in the episode are gambling, shopping, and sports. Although the sports activity is part of Chuck's entertainment, it is examined under the sport title because the characters perform it. This episode focuses on Blair and Serena, and the work activities cause a reduction in the duration of leisure activities.

Season 2 episode 10 focuses on Dan and Jenny. In this episode, since the working activities of these two characters are higher than in the series, leisure activities take up less space than in the episodes in the sample. Socialization activity is 12 minutes and 18 seconds, and sexuality is 2'47"; use of communication tools is recorded as 1'48", and recreational activities occur for 57 seconds. In this episode, if leisure activities are handled as separate topics, work activities are in the first place, with 14'47" among all activities. Nevertheless, leisure activities as a whole rank first.

In season 2, episode 24, based on Lily and Serena's family problems, leisure activities occupy a significant place at 34'49" in the 41'58" long episode. On the other hand, leisure activities include four types: entertainment,

socializing, using a communication tool, and taking a vacation. Entertainment activities cover 35.5% of the total time, socializing 32.6%, using communication tools 8.8%, and holiday activities 5.8%. As mentioned above, the most critical factor in this is the economic opportunities of Serena and especially Lily characters.

### **Use of Locations in the Series**

The uses of the locations in the series are divided into sub-categories as living locations<sup>2</sup>, health locations, working locations, educational locations, eating and drinking locations, entertainment locations, shopping locations, sports locations, and transportation locations.

Among the locations used in the first episode, living and entertainment locations occupy 28% of the entire episode by a 4-second difference. The third place is transportation locations. Next, come working, health, shopping, sports, and eating and drinking places. Notably, although the series' main characters are mostly high school-age teenagers, no educational venues are used in this episode; however, the type of location usage and the purpose for which it is used differ. While living locations occupy 11'57" in terms of location usage when the usage purposes are considered, it is seen that the usage for living purposes decreases to 3 minutes and 54 seconds. Likewise, entertainment venues are 11'53", and recreational use is 4'11". That shows that locations are used for purposes other than their types. When it is considered in terms of usage patterns, it is mainly used for socialization. Sexuality takes second place, and recreational uses take third place. When entertainment venues can be used for socialization beyond entertainment, they can also be used for sexual purposes. Again, the remarkable point is that the series has no educational institution, even as a venue.

There is a parallelism between working places and working purposes in season 1, episode 4. Working locations are 14'59", and working use is 15'06". However, the display times of living locations that are 24'36" decrease to 2'58" when it comes to living purposes. That shows that the characters perform other activities besides their vital activities in the locations classified as living locations. Similarly, although the time spent in transportation venues is 6'10", it decreases to 1'33" when it comes to usage. When it comes to shopping places and use for shopping purposes, it is seen that shopping, which gets rid of being tied to a place, especially with the help of developing technology, now enters the houses so that characters can shop online from their homes. The houses are used for gambling, although they are not places for gambling because gambling here is done illegally behind closed doors.

Among the types of locations in season 2, episode 10, the use of living locations covers 52%. Then comes the transportation venues, the percentage of which is 16%. However, the usage purposes of the living and transportation locations in the first two rows have been replaced by uses for work and socialization purposes. Use for living purposes takes third place, and transportation locations are used for other purposes beyond

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<sup>2</sup> Places where characters fulfill their basic needs such as eating and drinking, sleeping, resting, personal care; places where they stay alone, with family or friends, such as house, hotel room, boarding house.

transportation. The unique situation in the data is that although educational locations exist in the usage areas, they are used for socialization rather than for teaching or seeing.

When the location consumption in season 2, episode 24 is examined, it is seen that living locations and entertainment locations are in the first two places, while living and entertainment purposes are in the first two places in terms of use. The use for socialization is in third place among the forms of use, with approximately 20 minutes. The use for transportation is the end-use type of location in this episode.

### **Product-Service Consumption in the Series**

In season 1, episode 1, the entertainment service has a maximum duration of 10 minutes in consuming products and services. That equates to about 25% when considering the duration of the episode. Food services and products are followed by alcoholic beverages, housing, telecommunications, health, transportation, and textile consumption. The fact that the rate of benefiting from entertainment services is so high during these periods also gives information about the political stance of the series: It is necessary to get away from problems by having fun.

In season 1, episode 4, entertainment service consumption takes the first place. Next comes telecommunications service and accommodation service. In this episode, where artistic consumption products are also included, financial services are used for the first time.

The remarkable feature of season 2, episode 10 is the duration and percentage of telecommunication service. This period covers 30% of consumption activities, followed by food services and products. Housing service, which has almost the same percentage as food, ranks third.

In season 2, episode 24, entertainment service has 42.7%, food service 22.7%, telecommunication service 13.9%, transportation service 10.7%, and accommodation service 8%. The ratios to total consumption efficiency are 33.5%, 18%, 20.9%, 8.4%, and 6.3%, respectively.

### **The Frequency of Changing Clothes of the Main Characters in the Series**

When the frequency of changing clothes of the characters is examined, it is seen that the numbers are quite high for a 40-minute series. In the series, which gives a special meaning to clothes, the characters change clothes almost every time they change places. Clothing is a symbol of social acceptance for high-income individuals.

### **Communication Tools Usage in the Series**

Communication tools are essential in the Gossip Girl series, based on anonymous rumors spread through mobile phones and the internet. While the characters in the series send gossip to "Gossip Girl", they use all kinds of possibilities especially given by mobile phones. It sends text messages or uses the camera feature to

deliver a picture or video content to Gossip Girl. Mobile phone as a communication tool has an apparent superiority. Voice call, SMS, and MMS features are frequently used in the series, where all the features of mobile phones are used. In addition, the navigation feature used in season 2, episode 3 shows the importance of technology in the series<sup>3</sup>. The low rate of internet use through computers is because internet contents are now accessible even with mobile phones. In addition, the internet means staying connected to a place because it is not a computer-connected environment. This situation does not coincide with the lives of high-income people who are always on the move. The pay phone is used when Serena is in prison and in the setting of the 1980s.

### **Vehicles Usage in the Series**

A bus is used only in the first episode of the series. The bus, one of the public vehicles used by the middle and lower classes, is not used by the upper classes. Since they prefer their vehicles or taxis, it is rarely seen that they take public vehicles in the series. Due to its speed and comfort, the train used in the first part is preferred for intercity transportation, especially when short distances are concerned.

The most used means of transportation in the series are limousines and taxis. Especially since the limousine means economic superiority, the display of the limousine in the series is also important in terms of the lifestyles offered. On the other hand, taxi is preferred to public vehicles in urban transportation. This vehicle, which people from the upper class more frequently prefer, is not preferred by people with middle and lower economic levels.

### **CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION**

In this study, based on Neil Postman's argument that the Orwellian and Huxleyist one is the primary method of consuming the cultural spirit in today's modern societies, it is argued that the lifestyles and consumption phenomena presented in the Gossip Girl series are prepared and presented to the appreciation of the dominant ideology and power. The content analysis showed that the "Gossip Girl" series, as one of the products of the culture mentioned earlier, industry, exhibits an approach to ensure the continuation of the ideological structure in which it is produced. From this point of view, striking results are encountered when the categories examined in the series are considered.

Manhattan Island, particularly the Upper East Side, is the focal point for creating these false identities and individualities. The fact that cities and metropolises are the places where lifestyles are lived the most and where consumption is most intense, which Chaney mentions (1996, p. 60), stems from the fact that they are the focal point of life in civilized societies. The coexistence of different segments and their interaction

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<sup>3</sup> In 2007, when the first episode of the series was broadcast, smartphones and applications were not as widespread as they are today, so SMS (Short Message/Messaging Service) and MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service) were used, which were still in vogue at the time, but are almost never used today. The integration of GPS into cell phones was a relatively new technology at the time (the first cell phone that had built-in GPS capabilities is introduced in 1999) and not available on all phones.

prevented the monopoly of lifestyles only by the elite and caused other segments of society to adopt their unique lifestyles. The lifestyles presented in the series are a presentation of lifestyles in Manhattan. Even the Brooklyn characters struggle to keep up with the Manhattan lifestyle. In the series, Dan and Jenny's most significant problem is adopting these lifestyles. While Dan has difficulty adopting, Jenny, who has assimilated this lifestyle from the first moment, comes across social statuses, making it difficult for Jenny to accept.

The working class, represented by the Humphrey family, is conditioned throughout the series to work harder. On the other hand, this study is carried out to obtain an expenditure-based status. Members of the Humphrey family make the act of working to keep up with the lifestyles of the characters on the Upper East Side. Their position in the culture industry is based on consuming these cultural products rather than producing them, although they are working people. These Manhattan-oriented products are especially artistic items. The interaction between the lifestyles that Featherstone mentions (2007) follows a movement from the upper class to the lower class, as he states. The upper class, whose life forms are consumed by other classes, is searching for new life forms, and this process continues.

Considering the episodes examined in the sample, it is seen that a significant part of time use is based on leisure time. It is certain that leisure time, a privilege in pre-modern times, is necessary beyond being a privilege today. Leisure time, which ensures the reproduction of labor and the participation of the working people in consumption, occupies so much space that there is no need for the reproduction of labor. Such use of free time is a situation that is almost never encountered in today's capitalist societies. This situation is not seen in the working class, a privilege of the segment owning the production means. When the school/study times in the series are examined, the data obtained is minimal compared to leisure time. At this point, there is a warning for the working class by the power that owns the means of production. Work is valuable as it increases the interests of those who own the means of production. Just as overwork does not guarantee a happy life, little work is no sign of a miserable life. Work is just a tool for living. The series says it takes hard work to become a member of the upper class throughout all seasons. However, no matter how hard individuals work, they cannot rise to the upper class because work is only necessary for consumption. It is necessary to work to consume, and the income obtained without consumption has no value because consumption has ceased to be a production-based phenomenon and has come to a position of satisfying the ambition to reach high living standards (Kılıçbay, 1995, p. 108).

The time spent on education caused a similar result is encountered. The lifestyles presented, and the place of education in it does not have an important place when examined in the example of Gossip Girl. The primary priority of education in developing society is an indisputable fact. However, the lifestyle presented emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurship and getting somewhere through acquaintances, making education a must. Entrepreneurship, one of the most important agents of the American liberal system, has occurred among the lifestyles presented in this series. It is also said to the audience that better education can only come from private schools.

The use of life time in the sample is even less than school/work time. Like school/work time, life time is in the background of leisure time. Life times are put into the background because the capitalist system sees spare time as consumption time and vital (physiological) needs are replaced by the satisfaction of sociocultural needs in today's modern and postmodern societies, which is realized by filling free time with consumption. Süvari (2021, p. 191) states that society demands flexible courses and working hours and emphasizes that leisure activities have become a priority.

When viewed in the context of the leisure activities in the series, it is seen that there are two main activities in the analyzed episodes: entertainment and socialization. Socializing and sexuality using a communication device are the most common activities after entertainment and socialization across all departments. In other words, it is seen that all other leisure activities, except sexuality, have a structure based on direct consumption. However, a detailed study of sexuality will show that sexuality indirectly supports a lifestyle based on consumption and disposal.

Both Harvey (1989) and Lefebvre (2016) state that the essence of modernity is the unity of the momentary and passing and the eternal and unchanging. Therefore, with the standardization of positivist knowledge and production, with the industrial revolution, life started to continue its development in the urban environment by breaking away from the rural areas. For this reason, cities begin to form the central spatial axis of human life by taking on a different structure from previous periods (Yırtıcı, 2005, p. 83). In urban life, individuals spend most of their time at home, at work, and in places of consumption. Thus, locations and using locations are essential in people's lives. When the places in the series are examined, the validity of this determination of Yırtıcı is seen. Living locations have a unique advantage over other locations used in the series. Consumption locations under various sub-titles follow living locations. Study locations are the least discussed location in the series and are insignificant except for one of the episodes selected in the sample. At this point, the lifestyles presented in the series come into play. Because the lifestyles presented in the series are focused on consumption and business life is seen as an action that the lower classes should take. For this reason, about occupation, almost no one except members of the Hupmrey family is shown at work. On the other hand, the ones shown operate in areas such as trading or management rather than a labor-intensive process. This situation relates to the fact that the service sector preceded the profession based on commodity production in the postmodern process.

One of the most striking points in the series is that almost no shopping venues are shown in the drama. The shopping venues, shown for a total of two minutes in the sample, are shown much less than they could be during the presentation of the consumption phenomenon. Although shopping venues and events are not shown directly, consumption is implicitly instilled in the audience. Although shopping venues are not shown, the series takes place almost entirely in consumption locations, apart from living locations. Locations where consumption is compulsory such as cafes, restaurants, and entertainment venues, are frequently shown, and consumption is advised. In addition, with the effect of developing technologies today, it has become possible to shop without leaving the living locations. For this reason, the necessity of being in the shopping area has been

eliminated. Therefore, it has become relatively easy to realize and present consumption and shopping activity as a lifestyle because consumption independent of location is always everywhere.

In this study, the concept of clothing and fashion is not examined in depth; only the frequency of changing clothes of the characters is examined. The reason for this is that the fashion and clothing styles in the series have details that can be a thesis topic on their own. On the other hand, this research focused on the characters' consumption rather than their clothing styles. This act of consumption is based on wearing clothes instead of buying them. Therefore, it is calculated how many times the characters changed their clothes in the episode. In this context, numbers that can be counted for a 40-minute series are encountered. In the series, which gives a special meaning to clothing and significantly impacts world fashion trends, the characters change their clothes almost whenever they change places. Clothing is a symbol of social acceptance not only for high-income individuals but also for the middle class.

As the third major revolution after the agricultural and industrial revolutions, due to the rapid development in communication and computer technologies, the internet and mobile phones have started to form an area of politics, culture, and identity beyond being a technological innovation. In this new era, which is called the information society, communication and information technologies have reached a strong position in social relations. Timisi (2003, p. 89) stated that what is unique to this period is that the main production source is knowledge and effectiveness. Social and cultural processes depend on these new technologies and the information they bring. In "Gossip Girl," gossip is the primary production source. The society's young members that are the series' subjects have become dependent on the messages conveyed through Gossip Girl, their thoughts, human relations, and behaviors. This dependency has made McLuhan's global village concept come to life on Manhattan Island in New York.

In conclusion, consumption in the postmodern era does not only mean buying or using products. Compared to the past, consumer products are preferred not according to their functions but because they are part of the consumer's identity formation process. Consumers make consumption decisions based not on the necessity of the product or service but on the pleasure they derive from consumption and the possibility of this consumption forming an identity and then adopting new habits through these consumer products. People send messages to other people through the new identities they acquire through consumption. Consumption culture exists and reaches people through the media, which is increasingly developing and widespread today. The variable desires and constant desire for novelty observed in consumption culture are also mostly helped to be formed by the media. Like other media productions, TV series are vital in producing these values and spreading the dominant culture.

The phenomena of consumption and lifestyles, which are the subject of this study, are marketed worldwide by the American TV series industry. With the proliferation of international digital streaming platforms such as Netflix, Prime Video (Amazon), Disney+, Apple TV, HBO Max, and BluTV, TV series have become more popular than ever before. In Turkey, following TV channels such as CNBC-e and TNT in the early 2000s, countless TV

series are now available to audiences through local platforms such as Gain and Exxen and international streaming platforms. Among these, foreign and local platforms invest in local series, but foreign series has a clear advantage, especially on international platforms. This leads to audiences in Turkey being exposed to postcapitalist cultural products, often led by the US. By examining the neighborhood where the characters of the series live, their occupations in daily life, the activities in which they spend their free time, how they use the places for what purpose, their consumption of products and services in the classical sense, how they show diversity in clothing, which is one of the representatives of culture, as well as their use of communication tools and vehicles, which have become indispensable in modern life, it was tried to determine what the dominant cultural elements are. The findings indicate that "Gossip Girl" reinforces consumer culture and consumer society in all areas and points out that consumption has a central place in social behavior. The show promises that consumption leads to success and happiness. Through "Gossip Girl," consumer culture propagates and legitimizes a hedonistic existence that claims that happiness and success can be achieved through consuming commodities, spaces, time, and social relations.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

It is recommended that researchers who will conduct a similar study use two dramas in the sample instead of one. For a study in Turkey, it would be useful to compare if one TV series is foreign and one is domestic. The researcher thinks that if "Little Secrets" is the other series in the sample of this study, it will be helpful to compare the American and Turkish versions of the study and to see the similarities and differences. In addition, in a new study with "Gossip Girl", it will be helpful to compare the new version of the series, which started shooting in 2021, to see the change in the representation of lifestyles and consumption phenomena in the past period.

Also, the content analysis method chosen in the study caused working only with what is shown. However, performing discourse analysis on the same or similar series at the same time will allow more inclusive results, if not different.

Finally, the researcher presents the presentation of lifestyles and consumption phenomena as numerical data. When these numerical values are combined with impact research to be made on the audience, the data to be obtained will include the audience with the series, so it will go beyond just numerical data and reveal the interaction of these phenomena with the audience.

### **ETHICAL TEXT**

Journal writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics rules, and journal ethics rules were followed in this article. The author is responsible for any violations that may arise regarding the article.

This study does not need ethics committee approval.

**Author(s) Contribution Rate:** The author's contribution rate in this study is 100%.

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