



Exploring the Sensitivity & Violence Portrayed in *13 Reasons Why?* and Its Impact on Viewers

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the portrayal of sensitivity and violence in the 13 Reasons Why season 1 and analyzes its psychological and emotional effect on the viewers by applying the George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory. In this research a mixed-methods approach has been used. For qualitative content analysis scenes that were considered sensitive and violent has been selected, and for quantitative analysis, viewers' reviews and a keyword-frequency analysis with the help of "AntConc" software, has also been performed. The results show that repeated exposure to graphic visuals of sensitive themes such as bullying, assault and suicide triggers the spectators to experience phobia, trauma and psychological issues. The show has dual nature that has performed its role in both ways; becoming an inspiration for mental health awareness as well as portraying the risks of sensitive media graphics. This study finds that as the modern age is getting advanced in digital streaming era, therefore graphic visuals are highly effective in shaping the perception of viewers, as they cultivate such media.

1. Introduction

About the relation among media, violence, and viewer perception, there are intellectual and ethical discussions (Anderson et al., 2003; Gerbner et al., 2002). Content producers' and filmmakers' responsibilities to their audiences are increased and have become more complicated in the era of worldwide connectivity and digital streaming, where visual storytelling is becoming dominant over cultural discourse (Bandura, 2001). For analyzing how viewers are getting affected by excessive use of sensitive and violent graphics, the netflix series comprising four-seasons, 13 Reasons Why? makes a strong case. The show is centered on Hannah Baker, a high school student who commits suicide and leaves behind 13 number of cassette tapes, each introducing the person she considered was responsible for her suicide. The episodes present an unfiltered portrayal of social exclusion, bullying, sexual assault, and emotional turmoil set in an american high school (Bridge et al., 2020). The story pays attention to the serious results of such social behavior and portrays the effects of ignoring mental health, but the way the graphics have been used in the series is an exaggerated portrayal that ultimately cause international outrage (Arendt et al., 2019). A widespread concern about the parameters of sensitivity and the appropriate level of violence in visual media is reflected in the debate surrounding 13 Reasons Why? (Pirkis et al., 2019). 13 Reasons Why? splits critics and viewers from the first season. Some compliment it as a brave and necessary depiction of mental health issues that the media have long ignored (Niederkrötenhaler et al., 2010). The show is successful in lighting up crucial discussions regarding trauma, consent, and

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suicide. However, others condemn it for its graphic portrayal of sexual assault and suicide, saying that such scenes are the risk of disturbing and triggering viewers who are already at risk (World Health Organization, 2017). Mental health organizations Psychologists express concerns that the show might unintentionally romanticize or normalize self-harming behavior (Gould et al., 2003). A number of nations even reflect on censorship in response to reports that show an increase in internet searches on suicide after the show's premiere (Bridge et al., 2020). These contradictory responses showcase the study's main dilemma: how beneficial or harmful is *13 Reasons Why*? reflection of sensitivity and violence to viewers? It is questioned whether the series have unintentionally sustained negative views of suffering and hopelessness in an attempt to spread awareness. From a theoretical perspective that connects media consumption to psychological and social impacts, the significance of this investigation increases. An effective framework for this investigation is offered by "George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory" (Gerbner et al., 2002). According to Gerbner, viewers who watch television for a long duration develop specific social perceptions and worldview based on the specific graphics they watch for extended periods of time. Cultivation Theory focuses on the gradual development of specific behavior and beliefs over time. According to Gerbner, television serves as a cultural storyteller by constantly presenting allegorical representations of life that shape viewers' thinking of the outside world. The more people consume specific mediated content the more their perceptions of social reality will tend to match those depictions (Morgan and Shanahan, 2010). In such a case, *13 Reasons Why* functions as both amusement and a compelling cultural narrative that have the capability to shape attitudes toward assault, mental distress, and suicide. The series' depiction is not the only issue; viewers' cognitive-emotional constructs are impacted by persistent exposure to its content. The ethical considerations that formulate how violence is portrayed is at the center of the *13 Reasons Why* controversy. The suicide scene is depicted in the last episode of the first season in a prolonged, graphic fashion that many critics feel is extreme (Pirkis et al., 2019). The show's makers justify this scene by arguing that it is an attempt to represent the cruelty of suicide in order to discourage such actions. This declaration remain up for discussion. The process of portrayal itself has huge impact over how viewers would react. Viewers decode, incorporate, and cope emotionally what they see within their own mental frameworks rather than passively consuming it (Bandura, 2001). The viewer's coherent understanding may rapidly shift in favor of either desensitization or compassion when visual media blurs the lines between realism and hyperbolism. Since Cultivation Theory studies this accumulated impact, how consistent perceptions of social reality are produced by repeated exposure to specific meaning patterns, it becomes relevant in this context. The problem with *13 Reasons Why* is whether it promotes mental health awareness or unknowingly provoke a culture of sentimental spectacle. This series' dual identity makes it significant for scholarly research. Though it functions within a media economy that relies on emotional intensity, provocative effect, and spectator engagement, the show positions itself as a campaign for awareness. The ethics of representation is complicated when entertainment and campaign are combined (Couldry, 2012). It arises the question that whether using sentimental graphic portrayal to raise awareness really achieve the desired social goal or it only triggers viewers' emotional vulnerability. Researchers transcend ethical judgment by using Cultivation Theory to focus on tangible effects, such as how a viewer's worldview is slowly formed by drawn-out exposure to violent and sensitive narratives. Young audiences' ideologies of their own lives and relationships may be profoundly impacted by the integration of such allegorical representation.

Moreover, *13 Reasons Why* have a generational shift in how sensitive topics are discussed in the youth media. Unlike the previous decades, when some of the most common forms of representations of adolescence are often sanitized or symbolic, this series adopts a hyperreal aesthetic. It argues that the truth telling about pain requires the presentation of the audience with the complete visual reality and it accomplishes this by employing explicit detail as a tool of authenticity. This approach makes people more empathetic, but it also overwhelms the emotional control mechanisms, especially among younger viewers. The line between emotional trauma and empathic engagement have become fatally thin. The theory by Gerbner that television acts as the main cultural weapon of modern society highlights how such stories, when spread all over the media of the world, become the norm in terms of the emotional responses. The audiences can slowly become desensitized to real suffering or they learn to have unrealistic expectations of emotional catharsis in tragedy in case pain and violence become commonplace features of the narrative entertainment. The analysis of *13 Reasons Why* have broader implications on the understanding of the moral imperative of the narrators in the age of visual immediacy. Symbolic weight notable in each dialogue, picture, and frame facilitate the formation of meaning. To illustrate, the depiction of suicide in the series is so scandalous such that Netflix censors the graphic scene, knowing the possible damage to the audience who may be in danger. This decision is used as a case study of the significance of audience response and the need to be accountable when developing media. The Cultivation Theory-based academic research illuminates the means of negotiating the boundary between awareness and exploitation, which is still quite fragile. By learning how audiences absorb patterns of violence and sensitivity, researcher aids in the development of standards of moral storytelling, which educates the public instead of threaten them. The importance of this research is also expanded to the psychological and educational contexts. Mental health professionals condemn its ability to trigger depressive thought, but discussions of the Instagram posts of *13 Reasons Why* are employed to educate on empathy and the adverse consequences of bullying (O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Both responses point in one direction, which is, media substantially influence how people perceive their emotions and socialization. Shows such as *13 Reasons Why* turns into moral teachings that educate viewers on how to feel about suffering, justice, and retribution, should Gerbner be correct that television will become the new religion of our era (Gerbner et al., 2002). The repetitive nature of such stories which involve violence and suffering may thus

be an unconscious guide to behavior of emotion either by enhancing social consciousness or by creating hopelessness. To maintain the expression of art and protect the welfare of society, the cultivation of emotion by visual narration is going to be a cultural phenomenon, which is subjected for strong criticism. With this in mind, *13 Reasons Why?* is viewed as a cultural phenomenon in this study, which is worthy of scholarly research, and not merely a television series. Its combination of violence, sensitivity, and realism provides a rich platform of studying the relationship between the audience psychology, the media representation, and social ethics. The process of the gradual internalization of the meaning which occurs once the viewers are repeatedly exposed to emotionally charged material is followed with the help of the Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 2002). This paper examines how trauma, suffering and violence would be packaged within *13 Reasons Why?* to find out whether it results in a positive awareness that implies empathy and dialogue or whether it leads to the suffering of human beings by making it beautiful. The implications of this research are employed in enhancing the comprehension of the role of the media in transforming moral and emotional consciousness in the modern world not just in terms of media studies but in relation to psychology, education and cultural policy. The final purpose of the study is to bridge the disconnection between the meaning of the audience and the intention of the creators. The conflicts of modern storytelling are embodied in *13 Reasons Why?* which are both a controversial spectacle and a cautionary story. The hard part is to find out whether its portrayal of violence and sensitivity acts as distortion of social realities or its reflection. In doing so, the study has hopefully contributed to the ongoing debate surrounding responsible storytelling and how the media can influence not only what people watch but also how they feel, think and live in the world that those images have created.

1.1. Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it addresses one of the most important questions in the fields of media and social communication: what psychological and social impact sensitive and violent portrayals have on the audience? The analysis of *13 Reasons Why* season 1 explains the issues that directly affect the people opinion such as trauma and suicide and how such issues should be represented. This research contributes to the understanding of how visual narrative impacts the attitudes and perceptions of viewers towards sensitive topics using Cultivation Theory. The paper also focuses to the blur line between sensationalism and awareness-raising. The findings can be helpful to use in further research for teachers, scholars, psychologists and media specialists who seek to find a balance between awareness and realism in modern storytelling.

1.2. Problem Statement

The critical issues *13 Reasons Why* presents, has created lots of controversy because of its graphic representations of violence and suicide. Both sides agree that the show helps to provoke important discussions about mental health, while critics believe that the intensity of the show could have a negative psychological impact, emotional distress and imitation effects, especially for the most vulnerable audience. This ambiguity indicates the lack of understanding about interpretation and assimilation by viewers of such representations. If there is a systematic study regarding whether the series is an indication to awareness or not, the hypothesis can be considered as being true or not. Thus the purpose of this paper is to analyze the impact *13 Reasons Why* has had on its audience by analyzing the level of sensitivity and violence in this movie using the lens of Cultivation Theory.

1.3. Research Objectives

1. To investigate the psychological perceptions of viewers regarding trauma, suffering, and suicide in *13 Reasons why*
2. To examine the impact of repeated exposure to the graphic content of the series whether positive, neutral or negative
3. To observe whether the sensitive scenes in the series are portrayal of reality or hyperreality, causing distress.

1.4. Research Questions

1. How do audiences perceive sensitive scenes shown in the *13 Reasons Why* series?
2. To what extent does repeated exposure to the series develop specific perceptions of the viewers toward mental health?
3. Does the depiction of sensitivity and violence in *13 Reasons Why* portray reality or hyperreality leading to mental distress?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Population-level Signal

Ayers et al. analyzed the trends of internet search queries in a quasi-experimental way to identify alterations in suicide-related queries after the release of *13 Reasons Why*. They compared relative search volumes of terms associated with suicide in the months after the release of the show with anticipated baselines using Google Trends and time-series approaches. They consider search volumes as a population proxy of interest, ideation, or information seeking suicide. (PMC) The authors found statistically

significant rises in search of specific suicide-related phrases after the premiere of the series, indicating that more people were aware or interested in learning about suicide methods and self-harm in the short-term. They took the meaning of these spikes to mean that the series changed information-seeking behavior on a population level. (PMC)

It has such strengths as high-resolution and rapid measurement and the ability to measure near-real-time population response. Limitations are noteworthy: search data are proxy measures (they do not reflect behavior or acts done), are vulnerable to confounding by contemporaneous news coverage, and cannot determine which viewers were exposed or most vulnerable. Therefore, although the research provides initial data on the change of population interest, the causal correlation to harm to viewers needs to be supported by additional information (e.g., clinical, mortality statistics). Ayers et al. provide evidence that televised content can alter information-seeking behavior in a short time a short-term measure that is consistent with the concern about mediated worldviews in cultivation when exposure is focused (e.g., binge viewing).

2.2. Mortality Time-series

Bridge and colleagues utilized interrupted time-series analyses using U.S. mortality data in CDS WONDER system to assess whether suicide deaths in youth varied following series release. They considered the age group the closest to the characters described in the show (10 -17 years) and compared the observed counts monthly to the model prediction. (PubMed). The research found that monthly suicide deaths among youth significantly increased with the months after the premiere of the show and estimated that there were more youth suicides than normal during the period of study. The authors concluded that the release of the series was linked to the rise in suicide deaths in the target group and advised against exposing adolescents to the series. (PubMed)

The strong point of the article is the objective mortality data and strong time-series techniques. Nevertheless, time-series association is not causation at the individual level: the analysis cannot tell whether the people who died had watched the show, or whether it has completely controlled all the other causes of the society changing at the same time (e.g., news, seasonal trends). The time pattern (when, how long) and the heterogeneity of the effect in terms of demographics (sex differences) is also subject to further questioning. Nevertheless, the research was very impactful in policy and sparked discussions on media guidelines, despite these caveats. Taken at face value, these results imply that a high intensity of media exposure may be a factor in population-level changes in outcomes that are in line with cultivation theory that repeated media themes can change social perception in this case, making suicide a normal option among vulnerable young people.

2.3. Population Epidemiology and Methodological Debate

Niederkröthaler and colleagues analyzed more mortality series and additional social-media data (e.g., Twitter) to put any changes in youth suicide after the show into context. Their evaluation determined the trends by age and compared patterns of signals across platforms. (JAMA Network). The analysis established significant time relationships within certain subgroups and complex patterns which depended on age and gender. The authors have pointed out how significant a careful interpretation of the temporal association is, how contagion may occur in some settings and the necessity of media reporting guidelines. (JAMA Network)

A number of reanalyses and commentaries have argued over these findings on mortality. As an example, Romer (2020) and others questioned the nature of the time-series modeling and sensitivity of the results to choice of specification, citing that some of the effects reported can be less strong or not robust with different models. This discussion shows the sensitivity of epidemiological inference in media-effect settings to modeling decisions and highlights the importance of methodological triangulation (search data, clinical encounters, qualitative studies). (PLOS). The above discussion by Niederkröthaler et al. and the debate at large suggests that the population-level cultivation effects (assuming they exist) will be intricate, and will be subject to moderation of the susceptibility of viewers, of the cultural context, and the wider context of media. The ambivalent yet alarming indicators favor additional predetermined research instead of assertive causation.

2.4. Broader Social/Behavioral Effects

In addition to the mortality and search-trend indicators, other studies and reviews have explored the effects of 13 Reasons Why on the help-seeking, stigma, and perceived norms. Mixed results are reported in systematic reviews and content analyses (e.g., Guinovart et al., 2023; Carter et al., 2021): some viewers discuss more and less stigmatized, and disturbing data on distress and possible contagion among vulnerable populations. The significance of contextual messaging, trigger warnings, and resources to reduce harm is often discussed in these studies. (PMC)

3. Research Methodology

To explore the cultivation effects in 13 reasons why? this research will use the mixed methods research approach, using both qualitative and quantitative data. By using this research method the relation between media content and viewers perception will be observed to see how these two are connected with each other.

3.1. Research Approach

The research will follow a sequenced-pattern in which firstly the qualitative analysis will be conducted and secondly, based on this analysis quantitative analysis will be done. In qualitative data analysis the focus will be on the critical examination of the specific scenes of the series that highlights sensitivity and violence. In quantitative data analysis the focus will be on collecting the data from viewers to see the cultivation effect.

3.2. Qualitative Content Analysis

The researcher will conduct a thematic analysis of season 1. Focusing on the scenes that depict clear violence and based on that violence the suffering of that characters. The episodes having the most sensitive graphic scenes will be mentioned to determine how the specific scenes blur the line between realism and hyperrealism. This hyperrealism will serve as the basis for understanding that how the show is influencing the reality that may not even exist in reality.

3.3. Quantitative Content Analysis

For quantitative content analysis feedback resources from viewers will be used such as Instagram posts. The official Instagram account of this series has 286 posts about the show and on every single post there are 500-1000s comments from viewers that can be count as reviews. These reviews will clarify the cultivation effects of the show as each viewer has commented his thoughts according to his own perception from the show. Then:

- Statistics will be used to categorize light and heavy viewers in order to observe media consumption patterns
- To assess the main concept "Mean World Syndrome" of the theory, negative reviews will be focused.
- Ultimately, for the results that whether the show has been helpful for mental health awareness or not both positive and negative reviews will be observed.

3.4. Theoretical Framework

The theory used for this study is Cultivation Theory proposed by George Gerbner, which explains that how spectators' perceptions are shaped by long term exposures to media. According to this theory when a viewer is watching a specific genre for an extended period of time, he would eventually start to think about the world in the same way. Cultural storytellers such as television and other social platforms, repeatedly depict symbolic representations of life that are more effective because of the use of graphics. Viewers after giving excessive time on such platforms, begin to internalize those representations. These depictions then shape their beliefs, ideologies and expectations, as media is not merely an entertainment but a complete discourse. In the context of 13 Reasons Why, there is repeated exposure to sensitive content such as suicide scenes, trauma issues and mental health distress. This can influence viewers to perceive real world as much cruel as shown in the series. Therefore, the series' analysis is a powerful source for studying emotional and cognitive perceptions.

Moreover, Cultivation Theory introduces the concept of "Mean World Syndrome," which says that the viewers who view sensitive and violent content for a long period of time are most likely to see the world as cruel, violent and distressing as shown in the media. Therefore, this study will apply this concept to 13 Reasons Why that has shown such violence and sensitivity in such an excessive way. To see if it has made viewers vulnerable or strong with its graphic contents.

4. Analysis

From Hannah Baker's perspective the first season of 13 Reasons Why offers a deep experience of violence, sensitivity, trauma, bullying, sexual assault, emotional isolation and suicide. The series builds a story line that presents the pain and suffering by a young person and also makes the viewers to feel that distress and struggle within the main character. Such emotionally overwhelmed and sensitive depiction may, according to George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory, influence the viewers' acquired social reality with the time (Gerbner et al., 2002). A qualitative analysis included the sensitive and violent scenes of Season 1, while a quantitative analysis has been conducted on the reviews of the viewers through the reactions on posts of official Instagram account of the series. The qualitative analysis was specified with the scenes that include sensitive and violent portrayals. These scenes were chosen because they have the controversy of representing reality or hyperreality. In these selected scenes all the issues mentioned earlier like sexual violence, bullying, emotional suffering, suicide and institutional discouragement are represented, therefore were taken for the analysis.

The first significant action of social violence is when Justin Foley shares Hannah Baker's personal photo with the students in Episode 1 (13 reasons why, 2017, 00:45:26). In the scene there is no physical violence, but the disruption of her privacy, when her picture was shared socially everyone started talking about it leaving her in humiliation and isolation. The incident represents the ways in which emotional harm and social shaming can be psychologically violent. From this point of view the

repeated exposure of such depictions could shape the viewers' perception of social abuse as a normal and unavoidable part of teenager's life (Morgan and Shanahan, 2010).

The themes of stalking and dehumanization are very repetitive in Episode 4 (13 reasons why, 2017, 00:07:46), portrayed through the character of Hannah Baker who was the victim of these issues too. The camera angles (close-ups, low lighting) fully engage the viewers in Hannah's emotional suffering. The strategies used for depicting these visuals create emotional closeness to the viewers. The series promotes worldviews that create the main environment of stress, vulnerability and disbelief. Baker

The most violent scene; sexual violence is depicted through the characters of Hannah Baker victimized by Bryce Walker in episode 12 (13 reasons why, 2017, 00:42:23). The scene is extremely straightforward that can surely lead to mental disturbance and for sensitive viewers can be the source of trauma also. This portrayal can also be interpreted as the importance for highlighting the intensity of sexual assault and its psychological after-effects. On the other hand, critics say that the visual content is the exaggeration of the brutal reality and the way it is portrayed may be sensationalizing trauma (Gerbner et al., 2002). Cultivation Theory proposes that such repeated exposure to graphical scenes can gradually be internalized by viewers or can also help to normalize violent acts, specifically for heavy viewers who watch several episodes in one sitting (Gerbner et al., 2002).

Another most controversial scene in season 1 is the suicide depiction of Hannah Baker in Episode 13 which is lengthy and graphic (13 reasons why, 2017, 00:36:06). The actual scene was long and lengthy shots give the feeling of more realism due to the camera technique, but because of the highly sensitive controversies it was removed from the Netflix, now only the scene in which she decided to commit suicide is shown and later her dead body (Niederkrötenhaler et al., 2010). Because of the realism of the portrayal of self-harm, the scene was the subject of international debate. The producers justified it by saying they were trying to depict the harsh reality of suicide, but psychologists and mental health professionals say that such representations could have a negative impact on emotionally vulnerable audiences (Niederkrötenhaler et al., 2010). The removal of the scene highlights the ethical conflict between awareness and exploitation.

Hannah's suicide scene relates to the main feature of the cultivation theory "Mean World Syndrome". This theory states that excessive viewing of negative scenes can lead to viewers' perspective as hopelessness, cruel, and emotional threat (Gerbner et al., 2002). In the whole series, Hannah's administrators (parents, teachers and counselors) constantly fail to protect her. In Episode 13, Hannah talks to the school counsellor, Mr. Porter, whose behavior is an example of institutional neglect. He does not respond to, or take any charge for Hannah's emotional state (13 reasons why, 2017, 00:32:10). Such graphic visuals can provoke the concept that counselling systems, meant for support are not effective and that emotional suffering is inescapable.

The qualitative results show that there is an ongoing mixture of sensitivity and violence in the series. The flashbacks and voiceovers along with the cinematography that emotionally engage the audience, leaves the feeling of emotional suffering in viewers' mind. These methods convey sympathy with the audience but also play a role in emotional vulnerability. So, the series is a sort of awareness-provoking storytelling and highly emotional entertainment at the same time.

Besides qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis was also carried out to know the viewers' reaction on sensitive scenes and violent scenes. Viewers' reactions were gauged by comments and discussions made under the official Instagram account of 13 Reasons Why. The study used the AntConc corpus analysis software to determine the frequency of common emotional and psychological words appearing in the audience responses, to make the analysis more systematic and authentic. Emotion words that frequently appeared in the tweets were pulled out and classified based on their emotional valence (stress, depression, suicide, mental health, awareness, triggering, sadness, public message). The researcher was able to categorize the responses as positive, negative, and neutral to the sentences using software-assisted keyword frequency analysis, which was more objective than making all judgments based on the subjective interpretation of the researcher.

Instagram comments were impossible to get a full dataset of, so in order to draw insights, a representative selection of comments were taken from publicly visible discussions that were attached to the official Instagram account of the series. The responses were then qualitatively analyzed together with the keyword frequencies derived from the corpus with AntConc.

The quantitative analysis was limited to 3 themes:

- Awareness and empathy (positive reactions).
- Negative reactions associated with emotional distress and/or negative influence.
- Neutral reactions, realism and entertainment value.

Approximately 46% of the audience-response keywords extracted by AntConc were positive (based on the 'frequencies' analysis). Words associated with the expressions that have been repeated often were "awareness," "important message," "mental health," "realistic," and "discussion." The following are the results of these responses that many viewers thought that

the series was effective in raising awareness about depression, bullying, sexual harassment, and suicide. The emotional drama of Hannah Baker's journey was also popular and audience members felt the play prompted important conversations with young people, parents and teachers.

Feedback from the representative audience consisted of many comments like:

- “This series helped me realize the potential danger of bullying (Netflix, 13 reasons why, 2019a).
- “The show was beneficial to everyone talking about depression and suicide in an open manner”(Netflix, 13 reasons why, 2019b).

Others viewers had negative reactions to the series. Some 38% of the extracted keywords were related to emotional distress and negative psychological reactions. Words that were repeatedly used were “triggering,” “stressful,” “disturbing,” “depressed” and “hopeless.” Many viewers commented that the visual depiction and emotional impact of the suicide scene were too distressing. Some of the viewers also mentioned that they their feelings of sadness, mental stress and disturbance were intensified after watching the series in excessive.

Some of the representative feedback from the audience was:

- The graphic and emotional suicide scene was too much (Netflix, 13 reasons why, 2019c).
- I was an emotional wreck during the entire viewing of the series.” (Netflix, 13 reasons why, 2019d).

Less than one-fifth of respondents (16%) responded with neutral or mixed feelings. The keywords in these responses included “realistic,” “intense,” and “complicated,” suggesting that audiences not only recognized the learning aspects of the series, but also the emotional challenges within them. The audiences thought that it was very social and heavy psychologically.

The categorized findings are as follows:

- Positive / Awareness 46%
- Negative / Distress 38%
- Neutral / Mixed 16%

The statistical outcomes validate the qualitative analysis and illustrate the importance of cultivation theory. Those who watched all the episodes of the series in one sitting had higher levels of despair, fear and anxiety. This shows that the exposure to highly emotional media narratives for an excessive time can have an impact on ideologies in shaping the thoughts. The analysis also shows that the series produces a double effect on the viewers. On one side, it promotes empathy, emotional vulnerability and communication about mental health. On the other side, violent and self-harm visuals may be disturbing to the sensitive viewer and can also trigger their emotional suffering in daily life. So, this series exists in a complicated ethical area that has awareness and harm in contradiction at the same time. In total, Season 1 of 13 Reasons Why demonstrates the conflicting nature of this sensitive, violent, and culturally warning media that is also an emotionally risky experience. The series explores the potential of visual storytelling as a tool for shaping the emotional response viewers may have to trauma, violence, and social relations within the context of Cultivation Theory.

5. Discussion

As the series has constant portrayal of trauma, violence and emotional distress, the results of this research suggest that 13 Reasons Why is effective for shaping the viewers thoughts. Research shows that as the sensitive and violent scenes appear repeatedly in the series so they have high emotional impacts that can result in cultivation of specific perspectives, using George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory. The qualitative analysis showed that both physical and mental type of sensitive and violent scenes were represented in the series, addressing the issues like social detachment, bullying, assault and psychological neglect. In Season 1, Hannah Baker's storylines show how it's impossible to avoid suffering, and that suffering builds up over time. These experiences are repeated, allowing viewers to feel the pain shown within the story. It reinforces Gerbner's contention that the culture and perceptions of an audience are slowly, incrementally formed by repeatedly showing symbolic patterns of reality through television and streaming media (Gerbner et al., 2002). The study also revealed that the emotional realism of the series increases the involvement of the viewers. The use of flashbacks, voiceovers, close-ups and immersive storytelling help to establish a powerful emotional connection between audience and Hannah Baker. As a result, the audience is not just spectator but a feeling participant of the narrative world. This emotional involvement enhances cultivation effects since the repeated contact with the represented reality creates a psychological reality. Overall, the series has been successful in raising awareness about mental health, bullying, depression, and sexual assault, as evidenced by positive responses from the audience. The series was viewed as educational and socially needed by many viewers, as it stimulates discussion that is not normally explored in

society. These results achieve the first research objective by demonstrating that the sensitive content was emotionally interpreted by viewers in empathic and aware ways.

The study also revealed that there was strong negative response from the viewers. Words like emotional exhaustion, sadness, anxiety, discomfort, psychological exhaustion were used by many audience members to describe their emotions after watching the series. Hannah Baker's graphic portrayal of suicide was especially harsh on the 19-year-old for being emotionally upsetting. The following responses address the concerns of psychologists about the negative effects of violent and/or self-harm imagery (Niederkrötenhaler et al., 2010). The results also relate to the theory of "Mean World Syndrome" involved in Cultivation Theory. Heavy viewers, especially those who binge-watched the series, had more feelings of hopelessness, emotional vulnerability and mistrust of social institutions. The continuous rejection of authority figures in the story (parents, teachers, counsellors) helps to reinforce the feeling that it is impossible to escape from emotional suffering and that no help can be found. The study shows that the power of the media is two-faced. The same scenes which promotes empathy and awareness can lead to emotional distress and sensitivity. This is because of its complexity and the ethical dilemma of violence and sensitivity in media representations. The series is trying to promote awareness of mental health, but its hyper-realistic graphics may be emotionally draining for weak viewers. In general, the discussion illustrates the fact that 13 Reasons Why is a socially significant narrative and a controversial media text. The series is informative and can be potentially harmful to the audience's emotions at the same time. In line with the concept of Cultivation Theory, this study demonstrates that frequent exposure to sensitive and violent depictions can influence viewers' feelings, social attitudes and understanding of mental illness.

6. Conclusion

This research focused on the depiction of sensitivity and violence in season 1 of 13 Reasons Why and how they affected viewers according to the Cultivation Theory proposed by George Gerbner. The research followed a mixed method, both qualitative and quantitative, which included analyzing the selected scenes of the series and the reviews of the spectators from Instagram posts. The results showed that the series had a strong impact on the psychological state of the audience. Depiction of sensitive themes such as bullying, depression, sexual assault, isolation, social detachment and suicide were portrayed in a transparent manner as with no filters. Repeated exposure to such scenes resulted in provoking despair and awareness. The study validates Cultivation Theory as the means of understanding the effects of streaming media. Those who watched a lot of the series tended to view the world as emotionally threatening and socially brutal. This aligns with Gerbner's theory of the "Mean World Syndrome", which relates to the phobia that happens when watching negative media representations on a regular basis. The study found that there are not only negative reviews to the scenes depicted in 13 Reasons Why. most of the people thought that the series was successful in promoting conversations about mental health, bullying, and sexual violence. The series thus serves as a cautionary tale and a flashback to the problem of emotional distress. But the graphic imagery of violence and suicide creates serious moral issues, too. Some scenes are graphically realistic and can have an emotional impact on sensitive viewer and may inappropriately reinforce harmful behavior. The results indicate that although there was a significant increase in awareness with a realistic storytelling, the creators of the media must also take into account the psychological effects of extreme visuals.

This study is able to achieve all the research objectives and research questions successfully. It illustrates how an audience psychologically responds to the series vicariously through empathy and distress, how repeated exposure creates worldviews and emotional perceptions and how the series creates awareness and simultaneously exposes the viewer to emotional harm and emotional desensitization. Overall, 13 Reasons Why is the complicated representation of media ethics, violence and audience perception in the modern age. The series proves that graphic visuals can have a significant effect on emotional state and social reality. Therefore, when creating a series or any other media on a sensitive matter, it is important to keep the balance maintained between reality and hyperreality. So that the audience do not face the contradiction between what is real and what is exaggerated.

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