



Perception, Emotion, and Motivation: The Role of Media Consumption amongst Indian Adolescents

Amaeera Kher

Vasant Valley School, New Delhi, India

E-mail: amaeerakher03@gmail.com

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Abstract

Adolescents today live in a world that is both defined and represented by media, where digital content regularly shapes their feelings, views, and motivations. This study analyses how this media impacts the psychological well-being of adolescents by using surveys and interpreting the responses through qualitative content analysis. The analysis depicted that media has a dual impact; it can serve as both a way to control emotions and a catalyst for antagonistic feelings, affecting how adolescents see themselves and compare to others. Alongside the emotional impacts, increased awareness, altered ideas of beauty and success, and unclear lines between online and offline life were noticed under perceptual changes. Media also inspired aspirations, self-reflection, and community involvement, but it also created cycles of reliance and stress to perform. The findings reinforce the Reinforcing Spirals Model, showing that media strengthen and reflect existing perspectives and emotions. The study infers that adolescents follow a feedback loop where media leads to both reacting to and shaping their mental conditions, highlighting the significance of being more aware and critical about their media consumption.

Keywords: *Media; Perception; Adolescents; Emotions; Content Analysis; Motivation; Gender*

Introduction

As modern society evolves, technology has transitioned from a luxury to a necessity, making forms of media, such as television shows, music, and films, a significant component of individuals' daily lives. From widespread early and now daily exposure to digital content such as *Cocomelon* among toddlers, to the prevalence of binge-watching long-form series like *Stranger Things* among adolescents, media engagement has shown a particularly rapid increase among the younger generations. A study conducted in urban India found that 99.7% of children were exposed to screen-based media by 18 months of age, with 56.5% spending more than two hours per day engaging with such content [1]. Furthermore,

in the United States, over half (50.4%) of adolescents aged 12–17 report spending four or more hours daily on screen-based media [2].

People often believe that their media preferences are shaped entirely by their choices and personality. However, this overlooks the impact that the content itself has on those preferences. The Reinforcing Spirals Model explains that individuals are likely to choose media content that reflects and resonates with their existing attitudes or identity, but this exposure simultaneously reinforces and deepens those same attitudes over time, alongside adding newer outlooks. The process forms a feedback loop; media is both influenced by, and influences, the viewer [3].

This is particularly relevant during adolescence, when identities are still forming and attitudes are more malleable. In a four-wave longitudinal study of 2,550 [4] it was found that exposure to violent media content significantly increased in aggressive attitudes over time, and vice versa; aggressiveness also increased consumption of violent content. Therefore, viewers tend to assume they choose what to watch based on what they feel or want at the time, without recognising that media also shapes how they think and feel. This creates a cycle: a thought or feeling leads someone to watch a certain type of content. The content, while chosen intentionally because of one's own interests, also has its own ideals to show, impacting the viewer's beliefs or emotions. These new beliefs influence decision-making skills in choosing content further, and as the viewer consumes more content, this cycle repeats itself.

While this cycle is generally valid, it has become more complex with growing digital dependence. Today, younger audiences are exposed to media before they even form clear opinions or choices. Screen-based media content often becomes one of the first things children react to or engage with and this shifts the cycle, making it less about personal choice and more about how media influences that choice right from the beginning.

This paper aims to explore how films and media affect three major areas of psychology: emotions, perception, and motivation:

- **Emotions:** Media can elicit intense emotional responses and can also help as a coping mechanism. This paper explores how such responses affect individuals after they take place.
- **Perception:** What one sees influences how one thinks, dresses, speaks, and other basic features of identity. This section looks at how the media changes this personal perception and worldview.
- **Motivation:** Stimuli such as fast-paced music, intense visuals, and character transformations can impact viewers. This paper explores how these elements of media affect a person's drive and behaviour.

Media's influence on human behaviour and self-view has been examined from several angles: its emotional impact, perceptual effects, and push on motivation. Across these different aspects, researchers have shown that what one watches plays a more integral role in one's life than most would expect.

Media and Emotional Responses

Osborn and Endsley (1971)[5] explored how violence shown in the media affects young children. Their study used galvanic skin response (GSR) to measure emotional reactions in children aged 4–5 who were exposed to violent and non-violent scenes from both cartoons and real-life TV shows. The children showed high emotional arousal—especially during the violent human scenes. Interestingly, even though they said they liked the non-violent scenes more, they remembered the violent ones in much more detail. This shows how emotional intensity affects memory and suggests that viewers may not just passively watch media but respond to it deeply, often without realising it.

Kubrak (2020)[6] focused on how just one film can shift viewers' attitudes—this time, toward elderly people. After watching a film with a positive portrayal of the elderly, participants showed changed attitudes in post-film assessments. While younger participants didn't retain this change for long, older ones did. The study highlighted how emotional media content can create temporary or even lasting changes in perception depending on the viewer.

Both studies show that emotional reactions to media aren't just momentary—they can change how an individual thinks, remembers, and forms opinions.

Media and Perception Formation

Radstone [7] looked at how media creates something called “prosthetic memory”—memories formed through media that individuals begin to see as their own. She showed that films don't just help people recall existing memories; they can also implant new ones, shaping identity and culture. This includes both national identity (through films about shared trauma) and personal beliefs that come from repeated emotional engagement with cinema.

In a different direction, Hawkins [8] studied how children remember central vs. peripheral details in films. The results showed that while older children remembered the central ideas better, what really stuck with all age groups were the parts they found interesting—even if those weren't the “main” message of the film. This supports the idea that media can subtly shape perception even when viewers aren't consciously focused on it. Thus, the literature states that the media one consumes shapes their worldview.

Media's Influence on Motivation and Identity

Coyne and colleagues [9] explored the long-term effects of exposure to Disney Princesses on young boys and girls. They found that these characters often reinforced traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The study showed that while girls weren't hugely affected in terms of body image, boys who consumed this content—especially in homes with a lot of parental involvement—reported more body esteem issues. On the flip side, children also showed an increase in prosocial behaviour, like helping and sharing. This study showed that the media does not just affect how one perceives others, but also the way they act, and what they expect of themselves.

Other studies have also shown that fast-paced editing, emotional music, and character transformations in media can make people feel inspired and driven. While these effects may seem short-lived, they often leave an impression strong enough to affect goal-setting, daily choices, and self-perception.

Each of these studies highlights a different way in which media affects us—whether that's emotionally, perceptually, or motivationally. What connects them all is that the impact goes far beyond entertainment. However, most of these studies look at only one of these three factors at a time, and often focus on a single age group. This study aims to examine all three dimensions together, across multiple generations, to better understand how media shapes the way people think, feel, and act. This paper aims to look at the cyclic nature between emotions, perception and motivations, all three of which are both impacted and impact viewing choices.

Method

Sample

This study used purposive sampling to target adolescents who regularly engage with films, television, or digital media. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objective—in this case, being within the adolescent age group and active media consumers.

The final sample consisted of 30 adolescents aged 13 to 18 years. All participants completed the first survey form, and a subset of these participants—who had already responded to the first—then completed a second, more detailed survey.

Table 1: Demographic Details

Demographic Category	Count	Percentage
Gender		
Female	20	80%
Male	5	20%
Media Engagement Frequency		
Daily	22	88%
Several times a week	3	12%

Procedure

Data collection was carried out in two phases using Google Forms. The first form, titled “*Media & its Psychological Impacts*,” was designed to gather broad insights into adolescents’ media consumption habits and general emotional, motivational, and behavioural influences. The second form, titled “*The Effects of Our Perception*,” was a follow-up survey filled only by those who had completed the first. This form aimed to explore more subjective patterns of perception, interpretation, and internalised media influence. Participants were informed through school-based networks and direct online sharing.

Data Collection

- Survey 1 (*Media & its Psychological Impacts*): Structured multiple-choice questions (MCQs) focused on media use frequency, emotional control, motivational drive, and self-reported behaviour changes in perception and understanding, influenced by films or shows.
- Survey 2 (*The Effects of Our Perception*): A more reflective and subjective form containing mixed-format questions (MCQs and open-ended responses) to assess how media subtly shapes perceptions, identity, emotional responses, along motivation.

Data Analysis

The present study used qualitative content analysis [10]. It is a widely used method to systematically interpret data by reducing large volumes of data into organised units of meaning without losing the essence of the participants’ responses.

A number of stages were involved in the present analysis. First, the responses were read multiple times to capture the holistic sense of the material. Then the text was divided into meaning units, which referred to phrases that reflected a distinct idea that was related to the research questions. These units were further condensed into shorter statements, without losing the essential meaning of the data. Each of these units was labelled with a code that functioned as a descriptive tag. Similar codes were sorted into categories, reflecting the observable aspects of the data. Finally, the categories were abstracted into themes that captured the underlying patterns of meaning, thus allowing a move from description towards interpretation. This framework provided a systematic yet flexible way to explore and understand the cyclic influence of media on adolescents' emotions, perceptions, and motivation.

Ethical Consideration

All participants were informed of the study's purpose, assured of anonymity and the confidentiality of the data. Moreover, their rights as participants were also shared with them. Consent was obtained before participation. The data was handled respectfully and used only for academic purposes.

Results

Responses were collected from a sample of adolescents aged 13 to 18 through two distinct surveys. The first survey, "*Media & its Psychological Impacts*," gathered general data on media habits, emotional influence, and behavioural patterns. It received 45 complete responses—20 from females (80%) and 25 from males (20%)—all aged 14–17. A follow-up form titled "*The Effects of Our Perception*" was completed by a subset of these respondents and explored deeper, subjective associations with media content.

The table below summarises major findings across behavioural, emotional, perceptual, and motivational dimensions:

Table 2: Behavioural Dimension

Area of Behaviour	Most Chosen Response	Second Most Chosen response
Watching frequency	Daily: 22 responses (88%)	Several times a week: 3 responses (12%)
Genre preferences	Comedy: 12 responses (48.0%)	Romance: 4 responses (16.0%)
Language preferences	English/Hindi: 25 responses (100.0%) – 20 female (80.0%), 5 male (20.0%)	
Subtitle vs dub	Subtitles: 20 responses (76.92%) – 15 female (75.0%), 5 male (25.0%)	Dubbed versions: 5 responses (19.23%) – 5 female (100.0%), 0 male (0.0%)
Good way to relax	Yes: 25 responses (100.0%) – 20 female (80.0%), 5 male (20.0%)	
Rewatching VS New content	Rewatching: 19 responses (73.08%) – 16 female (84.21%), 3 male (15.79%)	New content: 6 responses (23.08%) – 4 female (66.67%), 2 male (33.33%)

Table 3: Emotional Dimension

Area affecting emotions	Most Chosen Response	Second Most Chosen response
Feelings about content with strong emotions	Emotionally moved: 8 responses (30.77%) – 6 female (75.0%), 2 male (25.0%)	Disturbed or anxious: 7 responses (26.92%) – 7 female (100.0%), 0 male (0.0%)
Change in mood after watching	Yes, often: 15 responses (57.69%) – 13 female (86.67%), 2 male (13.33%)	Sometimes: 7 responses (26.92%) – 4 female (57.14%), 3 male (42.86%)
Rewatching VS New content	Rewatching: 19 responses (73.08%) – 16 female (84.21%), 3 male (15.79%)	New content: 6 responses (23.08%) – 4 female (66.67%), 2 male (33.33%)

Table 4: Perception

Perceptive responses	Most Chosen Response	Second Most Chosen response
Does response change as we grow older	Yes, significantly: 14 responses (53.85%) – 11 female (78.57%), 3 male (21.43%)	Yes, somewhat: 10 responses (38.46%) – 8 female (80.0%), 2 male (20.0%)
Does age change impact	Yes, they are more easily influenced: 17 responses (65.38%) – 14 female (82.35%), 3 male (17.65%)	Yes, but only slightly: 6 responses (23.08%) – 5 female (83.33%), 1 male (16.67%)
Has the media influenced you to do something new	Yes, often: 12 responses (46.15%) – 10 female (83.33%), 2 male (16.67%)	Sometimes: 12 responses (46.15%) – 10 female (83.33%), 2 male (16.67%)
Do movies reshape views	Sometimes: 11 responses (42.31%) – 10 female (90.91%), 1 male (9.09%)	Yes, often: 9 responses (34.62%) – 7 female (77.78%), 2 male (22.22%)
Do you discuss content?	4.0: 11 responses (42.31%) – 10 female (90.91%), 1 male (9.09%)	5.0: 10 responses (38.46%) – 8 female (80.0%), 2 male (20.0%)

The second survey, titled “*The Effects of Our Perception*,” was administered to a smaller subset of respondents who had already completed the first form. While the first survey gathered broad media-related data, this second form was designed to explore more introspective and subjective dimensions—specifically, how individual personality traits influence perception and decision-making in media contexts. The sample included a balanced mix of adolescent boys and girls aged 13–18.

The table below summarises key patterns across emotional, perceptual, and personality-related variables:

Table 5: Key Patterns across the Domains

Area of Behaviour	Most Chosen Response	Second Most Chosen response
When faced with a tricky situation, what's your first instinct?	Find a logical way to solve it: 5 responses (45.45%) – 3 female (27.27%), 2 male (18.18%)	Talk it out with someone you trust: 4 responses (36.36%) – 1 female (9.09%), 3 male (27.27%)
How do you usually approach decisions in your life?	I like to weigh all the facts before deciding.: 4 responses (100.0%) – 1 female (25.0%), 3 male (75.0%) I tend to delay decisions until I'm sure.: 4 responses (36.36%) – 2 female (18.18%), 2 male (18.18%)	I prefer asking for advice to be sure.: 2 responses (18.18%) – 1 female (9.09%), 1 male (9.09%)
Imagine someone invites you to try something totally new—how do you feel?	Curious but cautious.: 7 responses (100.0%) – 3 female (42.86%), 4 male (57.14%)	
Do you prefer having your day planned out, or do you enjoy surprises?	I enjoy the spontaneity of not knowing what's next.: 6 responses (100.0%) – 1 female (16.67%), 5 male (83.33%)	I love a good plan—it keeps me focused.: 5 responses (45.45%) – 4 female (36.36%), 1 male (9.09%)

Table 6: Participants' responses to real-life scenarios (survey 2)

Questions	Most Chosen Response	Second Most Chosen Response
You are asleep, living alone in your house, when you are awoken by a loud creek of your door. What is the first thing you would do by instinct?	Get up to investigate: 6 responses (54.55%) – 3 female (50.0%), 3 male (50.0%)	Ignore it and try to sleep: 4 responses (36.36%) – 2 female (50.0%), 2 male (50.0%)
You're watching a rom-com film, which ends with an airport chase scene bringing the two characters together. Had you known the ending of the film before, would you:	Look for something different to watch: 4 responses (36.36%) – 2 female (50.0%), 2 male (50.0%)	Still watch the film: 5 responses (45.45%) – 2 female (40.0%), 3 male (60.0%)
You're watching a crime film, where in the end, the falsely accused defendant gives an emotional monologue to prove himself to be innocent. Had you known the ending of the film before, would you:	Look for something different to watch: 6 responses (54.55%) – 2 female (33.33%), 4 male (66.67%)	Still watch the film: 4 responses (36.36%) – 3 female (75.0%), 1 male (25.0%)

You have to make a big gesture for a loved one to express your feelings of gratefulness, love, etc. Which of the options are similar to something you would consider?	Making a heartfelt card with old photos and a note you have written: 7 responses (63.64%) – 4 female (57.14%), 3 male (42.86%)	Simply talking in person or via text to express feelings: 2 responses (18.18%) – 0 female (0.0%), 2 male (100.0%)
You're watching a sports film, where in the end, the underdog player of the team scores the winning goal and the team wins. Had you known the ending of the film before, would you:	Still watch the film: 4 responses (36.36%) – 2 female (50.0%), 2 male (50.0%) Watch, but with less interest than before: 4 responses (36.36%) – 3 female (75.0%), 1 male (25.0%)	Look for something different to watch: 3 responses (27.27%) – 0 female (0.0%), 3 male (100.0%)
You're watching an emotional film, where the main character battles with a terminal illness and in the end, does not make it. Had you known the ending of the film before, would you:	Look for something different to watch: 5 responses (45.45%) – 2 female (40.0%), 3 male (60.0%) Still watch the film: 5 responses (45.45%) – 2 female (40.0%), 3 male (60.0%)	Watch, but with less interest than before: 1 response (9.09%) – 1 female (100.0%), 0 male (0.0%)
You have just been accused of cheating on a test, even though you did not. How would you react in this situation?	Be loud and vocal about your side of the story: 5 responses (45.45%) – 2 female (40.0%), 3 male (60.0%)	Go outside or to a private place to explain myself: 3 responses (27.27%) – 3 female (100.0%), 0 male (0.0%)
You have just been selected for your school team relating to your interest (Any sports team, Drama club, School band, etc.) How would you contribute?	Be a part of the activities or practices introduced by other members, feeding off the energy of my peers: 5 responses (45.45%) – 4 female (80.0%), 1 male (20.0%)	Take initiative and suggest new ideas or lead some activities: 3 responses (27.27%) – 1 female (33.33%), 2 male (66.67%)
You're watching a horror film, where you know you can expect many jump scares/scary or disturbing images. Had you known this before watching, would you:	Look for something different to watch: 6 responses (54.55%) – 2 female (33.33%), 4 male (66.67%)	Still watch the film: 3 responses (27.27%) – 1 female (33.33%), 2 male (66.67%)
Imagine you are feeling sad for any reason. How would you comfort yourself in such a situation?	Find myself a distraction: 4 responses (36.36%) – 3 female (75.0%), 1 male (25.0%) Listen to sad music and eat junk food: 4 responses (36.36%) – 2 female (50.0%), 2 male (50.0%)	Go for a run or do exercise: 2 responses (18.18%) – 0 female (0.0%), 2 male (100.0%)

When respondents were asked to cast actors in the following roles:

1. Doctor: Maximum mentions of male actors and actors/actresses who have played such roles before.
2. Caregiver: Maximum mentions of female actresses, actors/actresses known for warm personalities, and those who have played such roles before.
3. Criminal: Maximum mentions of male actors, actors caught in illegal activity in real life, and actors/actresses who have played such roles before.
4. Rich CEO: Maximum mentions of male actors, actors from film-industry families, and actors/actresses considered “conventionally attractive”.
5. Teacher: Maximum mentions of actors known for mostly serious or intense roles.
6. Person from a small town: Most mentions of actors/actresses with darker skin tones than the “conventionally attractive” norm, with no industry connections, and who have played such roles before.

Survey 1: Media & Its Psychological Impacts – This section analyses the quantitative data, which included responses from 30 adolescent participants aged 13–18. The survey studied the influence of media in emotional, perceptive, and motivational dimensions. Using content analysis, the responses were grouped thematically into three primary psychological categories: emotional responses, perceptual influences, and motivational impacts.

1. Emotional Responses

A large portion of respondents recognised media as both a source of emotional comfort and a stimulus that elicited newer emotional responses. 100% of participants agreed that watching films or shows was a good way to relax. 73.08% preferred rewatching previously seen content over exploring newer options, a choice that indicates emotional coping mechanisms such as familiarity bias and mood regulation.

When asked about their emotional responses to intense content, 30.77% reported feeling emotionally moved, while 26.92% felt disturbed or anxious. This suggests a high level of emotional engagement regardless of genre and shows that even while media content is selected on the basis of preexisting notions that act as driving factors, newer impacts are created regardless. Further, 57.69% of participants reported an evident change in mood after watching certain content, indicating the same as mentioned. These responses demonstrate both conscious awareness of media’s influence and a deeper, less explicit pattern of emotional dependence on content.

Additionally, the strong preference for subtitles (76.92%) suggests a desire for deeper immersion with content, indicating the explicit recognition of its impacts. Such a response of the respondents shows that content goes beyond entertainment and is a medium they want to connect with and feel.

2. Perceptual Influences

The data indicated the cyclic nature of existing perception, causing choices in consumption, while such choices also left them with a newer avenue of perception to explore. 53.85% of respondents agreed that their responses to content changed significantly with age, while another 38.46% observed moderate shifts. This first suggests that respondents feel an observable, explicit change in their worldview while also highlighting that change is more likely to happen among adolescents.

Participants also reported media influencing real-life behaviour and thought processes. 46.15% stated that media had pushed them to try something new, and another 46.15% indicated that it sometimes did. Further, 34.62% confirmed that movies reshaped their opinions or views “often”, with an additional 42.31% saying it occurred “sometimes”. These results suggest that adolescents experience not just entertainment but also identity-framing and value-shaping through media.

When asked about discussing content with others, over 80% rated their discussion frequency at 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale. This further elaborates on the idea that the media acts as a shared perceptual lens, having relevance among individuals for interpersonal reflection and validation.

3. Motivational Impacts

The motivational impacts were examined through questions on behaviour reactions and inspiration. The high daily engagement rate (88%) and preference for character-driven genres like comedy (48%) and romance (16%) show the need for sentimental resonance in long-term use.

Participants expressed being influenced to engage in prosocial or aspirational behaviour after exposure to specific media themes. Further, when asked about whether films inspired new thoughts or actions, more than 90% selected “often” or “sometimes”.

Genre preference data, along with responses highlighting changes in behaviour or mood, show that adolescents consciously look out for media that agree with their current emotional or psychological states.

Survey 2 aimed to analyse how adolescents subjectively comprehend media narratives and reflect them in personal behaviour, identity, and emotional response. Consisting of mixed-format questions, this survey looked at more qualitative analysis. A special focus was placed on paired scenario analysis, comparing participants’ stated media preferences with their real-life decision-making instincts and seeing how those differ with comparison to what they watch.

1. Emotional Responses

Emotional agreement between content and internal state was clearly observed. When asked about coping mechanisms during sadness, participants were evenly split between distraction (36.36%) and mood-congruent behaviour (36.36%), such as listening to sad music or eating comfort food. This reflects emotion-mirroring behaviour, where media becomes both a coping tool and a mirror of internal emotional states.

To analyse impact in a distress situation, the survey compared the desire to watch a horror film, versus reactions to such an intense scenario in real life.

- 54.55% would avoid the horror film.
- Yet, 54.55% said they would actively investigate a suspicious sound when alone at night.

This contrast suggests that while participants may avoid simulated fear, real-life responses are action-driven, possibly influenced by previous exposures to distressing content in media—even if the genre is no longer consciously consumed.

2. Perceptual Influences

Participants showed awareness of how the media has shaped their worldview over time. Responses showed that perceptions evolve with age, and while media may be appreciated for over-the-top or elaborative displays, respondents preferred more subtle ones in real life.

In a scenario pairing to view reactions on feelings of affection, participants were asked whether they'd watch a predictable romantic reunion film and how they express love or gratitude:

- 45.45% would still watch the film.
- However, 63.64% preferred simple, heartfelt gestures like making a card, rather than dramatic emotional acts.

This highlights a disconnect between consumption and real-world execution. Grand gestures are often romanticised in media but rarely imitated in real life, suggesting that adolescents perceive certain emotions or expressions as valid on screen but impractical or embarrassing off-screen. This shows that while the media has the ability to increase perceptive and emotional responses regarding love and affection, existing perception still influences real-life actions to an extent.

In the crime film pairing, participants considered a film involving a wrongful accusation and their own response to being falsely accused:

- 54.55% would not watch the film.
- But 45.45% said they would publicly defend themselves if wrongly blamed.

It was observed that a divide exists between media preference and behavioural alignment; participants may not enjoy emotionally intense narratives, but their personal responses reflect values of justice and a desire to save themselves, showing the existence of a fight or flight response.

3. Motivational Influences

Motivational elements showed most strongly in team-based and character-driven scenarios. When asked how they would contribute to a team versus whether they'd watch a sports film with a predictable underdog victory:

- 36.36% would watch the film without hesitation.
- 45.45% would engage actively as team contributors in real life.
- 27.27% would take initiative or leadership.

This suggests that even when content feels impactful, motivational arcs remain internalised; hence, participants adopt positive behavioural roles inspired by character transformations, yet also have their own perceptions or want to "fit in" or be accepted in society, still driving these motivations.

In the terminal illness film pairing, participants were asked whether they'd watch a film with a tragic ending and how they comfort themselves in real life:

- 45.45% would still watch the film; another 45.45% would skip it.
- In real life, most turned to media-based or sensory coping strategies, such as distraction or emotionally reflective music.

This reinforces that emotional vulnerability does not eliminate media influence; participants may reject emotionally exhausting content while still displaying emotional behaviours and coping patterns inspired by similar media themes and using them as a coping mechanism.

The final set of questions asked participants to cast actors for basic, prominent roles: doctor, caregiver, criminal, CEO, teacher, and person from a small town. Their choices revealed how long-standing media portrayals inform perceptions of personality, identity, and social status.

With the Observed Casting Patterns, These Results Highlight How Media-Driven Stereotypes Shape All Three Psychological Domains:

- Emotionally, participants associate warmth and care with female figures, reinforcing gendered emotional expectations.
- Perceptually, character portrayals reflect real-life diversity, whereas they also reflect historical influences of seeing certain genders dominate certain workfields.
- Motivationally, the repeated portrayal of success (CEOs, teachers, heroes) as male or privileged subtly informs who adolescents see as aspirational.

These casting choices suggest that even if participants reject stereotypical thinking consciously, their subconscious associations remain heavily influenced by repeated media portrayals. The internalised imagery of power, emotion, and social worth appears to reflect inherited perception more than personal ideology.

Discussion

This study examined how consumption of media among adolescents impacts three major psychological domains: emotion, perception, and motivation, while also examining whether these variables interact cyclically to shape media preferences and, in turn, are shaped by them. Drawing from both quantitative and qualitative data collected through surveys, this study investigates the relationship between variables using a multidimensional lens. The adolescent phase marks an integral developmental window, characterised by intensive emotional reactivity, evolving identity, and, in the current world, with increasing technological dependence, increased media engagement. As marked by Twenge & Campbell [11] and Ohannessian [12], adolescents are not just major consumers of media; they are also more likely to face its psychological effects due to ongoing neurocognitive maturation. This developmental sensitivity acts as the backdrop against which the study's results must be understood—especially in relation to the reinforcing loop of media preference, internalisation, and evolving self-concept.

Media emotional impacts were stated explicitly in the reflective and behavioural reactions. The majority of the participants (73.08%) reported wanting to consume previously-watched content again, and 100% reported media use as relaxation. This is robust evidence of Zillmann's Mood Management Theory [13] that states individuals select media content to manage or escape from negative emotional states. The rewatch option also relates to emotion-focused coping, a highly developed pattern in adolescents who tend to seek emotional safety in familiar narratives [14].

Also, the mimicry of the emotional state, witnessed among participants while watching mood-congruent material such as listening to sad music or watching emotionally stimulating content during traumatic events, reflects the forces established by Tuck et al. [15]. Their experimental results established that people have the tendency to watch media that reflects their emotional state, reinforcing rather than weakening their internal emotions. The same was witnessed among the present sample, with people often watching emotionally stimulating media but with the genre reflecting distressful or anxious emotions, with 26.92% of them feeling uncomfortable subsequently.

The twin duality of this engagement, as well as the intentional use of media for relaxation and unconscious emotional resonance, underscores the statement made by Wirth and Schramm [16] and Nabi [17] that media is not so much an elected distraction as an intense emotional stimulant. Interestingly, even for participants who characterised some films as "disturbing", many still registered mood change and intense memory recall related to such material. This is consistent with Osborn and Endsley's previous GSR research [5], which showed intense physiological arousal even when participants self-reported a preference for less intense scenes, underlining the discrepancy between reported preference and unconscious engagement.

The preference for subtitles (76.92%) also supports the argument for emotional immersion. Emotional engagement is a condition for the virality of content, according to Chawla and Mehrotra [18]; however, it could be that for teenagers, it could be an inherent desire to fully understand and internalise the emotional subtleties of a story. Subtitles, in this instance, go beyond their use as a linguistic aid and become an aid to increase engagement, allowing the viewer to consume the content in its original language while at the same time offering the viewer's own understanding.

Thus, the affective responses evoked while consuming media by adolescents seem to be on two connected dimensions:

1. Surface-level emotional control, defined by intentional content selection made in order to match or change mood
2. Subconscious emotional reception, whereby emotional and physiological responses to content drive memory, perception, and future decision-making

This two-step model would propose that teenagers are both conscious of media's emotional influence and susceptible to its less obvious psychological influence, but not necessarily at a conscious level.

The impact of media on perception was also striking, especially in the way that the participants interpreted real-world roles, identities, and situations. The findings revealed that 53.85% of the participants had felt their reactions to content had altered "significantly" over time, and 65.38% speculated that young viewers were more likely to be influenced. This introspection betrays an unarticulated awareness that perception is mediated and altered through repeated exposure.

This dynamic aligns with Gerbner's Cultivation Theory, which states that extensive exposure to homogenous media portrayals over time cumulatively conditions a person's worldview in accordance with those portrayals [19]. In this current study, this cultivation was observed in the casting situations, which showed deeply ingrained associations: male doctors, female nurses, light-skinned corporate executives, and affectively "warm" actors cast in nursing roles. These associations are rooted in entrenched film stereotypes and gender-based media tropes that derive their origins from the workplaces and gender roles of the past.

Even though teenagers may consciously dismiss stereotypical thinking, their natural choices in such a situation prove that their understanding is conditioned by repeated images and not just rational thinking in general. McLeod, Wise, and Perryman [20] describe this situation as a media effects perception paradox; audiences are aware that the media affects other people, but are not aware of its impact on themselves. In the current sample, the paradox existed in the contradictory participants' self-report beliefs and what their own responses revealed.

The combination of the scenarios uncovered an additional level of perceptual complexity. In the context of the romantic comedy, 45.45% of the participants were still happy to watch a movie with a

melodramatic airport reunion; however, when queried about their preferred ways of showing affection in real life, only 18.18% chose equally hyperbolic behaviour. In contrast, 63.64% chose sincere but low-key behaviour, such as making a card. This difference suggests that while young adults enjoy exaggeration, their real-life behaviour still conforms to social convention, thus substantiating Schneider, Gruman, and Coutts' [21] argument that perception is shaped by both internal thought and external constraint (for example, embarrassment or fear of social disapproval).

On the other hand, in situations such as crime or sports movies, where emotional arcs include justice, resiliency, or cooperation, real-life intuitions of participants were more aligned with media storylines. For example, 45.45% reported that they would actively defend themselves if falsely accused, and 27.27% reported that they would be proactive in a group situation. The findings are in favour of Bandura's Social Learning Theory, according to which observational learning from media figures is most probable when such figures demonstrate socially approved behaviours [22].

These results indicate that adolescent perception is selectively affected:

Passive impressions, like gender-role assumptions or stereotypes, are conveyed by the media without conscious awareness.

Active perceptions like behavioural decisions and social reactions are conditioned by the prevailing social context and determined by determinants like character alignment, reward streams, and peer norms.

The motivational reactions recorded in the questionnaires were that media can be used not only as a reflection of internal values but also as a model of possible behaviour. A high percentage of participants linked specific content, especially in sports and drama, with a view to enhancing or constructing their identities in life. This is in accordance with Cohen's Identification Theory, which describes how individuals who strongly identify with a character could take on their motivations and utilise them as a model for self-enhancement [23].

With the sports film mix, even where participants had predicted the outcome, the majority still found the story inspiring. Despite the foreseen path, 45.45% indicated they would actively engage in actual team settings, and 27.27% indicated that they would organise or initiate. These results are in line with Chang's [24] that motivational media does not necessarily need to be novel; rather, it must offer resonance. Namely, adolescents are not inspired by a surprise plot but by personal and emotional resonance.

In the same way, in the terminal illness experiment, the groups were split between viewing a depressing movie, but the emotional coping strategies that were reported, media, music, and emotional eating, were identical to the subject matter that the movies would then be portraying. This is in accordance with Green & Brock's Transportation Theory, which explains that highly engaging stories, even fictitious ones, are able to sway actual beliefs and behaviours [25].

In addition, the urge to belong or 'fit in' socially, as is also seen in team-oriented settings, is complemented by Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, which stipulates that intrinsic motivation is enhanced when one feels competent and socially related [26]. In the media, when individuals witness characters achieving success through perseverance or grit, they learn the motivations, particularly when they match individual or peer-based values.

Notably, your findings also suggest a complicated motivation–perception interaction. Participants were willing to appreciate emotionally rich, high-effort behaviours on screen but were not willing to copy them if they were weak or non-conformist (e.g., kissing in public). This suggests that motivational

potency is mediated by perceptual expectations—participants may be motivated to feel, but not necessarily to do.

The results of both survey types replicate the cyclical theory proposed in the introduction. Teenagers initially select content based on transient states of emotion or perception (e.g., stress relief, justice). They subsequently adopt new values or emotions from the experience (e.g., motivation, stress relief, identity formation) and subsequently change their media choice to align with these new internal shifts.

This phenomenon not only demonstrates Slater's Reinforcing Spirals Model [3] but also helps to demonstrate it further by demonstrating the specific susceptibility of adolescents to these spirals as a result of:

- Emotional plasticity [27]
- Identity vulnerability [28]
- Excessive exposure to the media [2][1]

The role-casting section illustrates how aggregated exposure solidifies into internalised, default gender, class, and profession assumptions that influence how teens perceive the world and themselves, even when their self-aware ideology is contrary. In the meantime, real-world response situations illustrate how character development and motivational framing instil behaviours for social integration, self-expression, or resilience.

Briefly, the study verifies the assertion that media is not merely a passive but also an active, shaping power that constructs feelings, perceptions, and motivations from the very beginning of engagement, and further refines these traits as consumption is more frequent.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study seeks to make significant contributions to understanding media influence on teens' emotions, thoughts, and inspirations; however, some limitations must be taken into account. First, the sample was relatively small and disproportionately split, with a higher proportion of females responding. This circumstance impedes the generalisability of the results and may have resulted in the building of gender-specific biases in the outcomes. Second, as data gathering was based on self-reported questionnaire data, answers might have been influenced by social desirability bias or the limitations of participants' self-awareness and recollection abilities. In addition, the use of school-based networks might have excluded teenagers with diverse socio-economic or cultural backgrounds, thus further limiting diversity of views.

For future research, it will be necessary to increase the sample size and heterogeneity with a focus on obtaining fair representation by gender, socio-economic status, and cultural background. Participation of participants with diverse backgrounds would enhance the validity of findings as well as provide a more complete understanding of the psychological impact of media. Future research can also include the use of mixed-method designs, like in-depth interviews, longitudinal follow-up, or experimental design, to augment survey data and provide more in-depth information about how media affect adolescent psychology in the long run.

Conclusion

The current study aimed to explore the contribution of media to adolescents' psychological well-being, especially in their emotional reactions, comprehension, and motivational impact. The study reveals that the media is an active psychological agent and not a passive setting. Media offers emotional comfort and channels of individual expression; however, it can amplify negative experience like anxiety, self-doubt, and social comparison. Adolescents participated voluntarily in reporting significant changes in their self-image and image of others, often internalising ideals and values depicted in media content. Motivationally, the media has been discovered to enhance creativity and aspiration, yet it also stimulates overexposure and performance pressure cycles. Finally, the study highlights the extensive impact of media on adolescent development as a reflection and also as a contributor to their psychological processes. Future studies can build upon these findings by researching cultural and gender-based variation in the media's impacts on children.

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