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Exploring the Influence of Psychological thrillers on Real-Life Behaviors of Youngsters

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Abstract

At the time of digital immersion, one of the most popular genres among youth audiences is a psychological thriller because these films are characterized by tense plots, ambiguous characters, and emotionally colored stories. This work discusses the influence of psychological thrillers on the life patterns of Youngsters, the focus being on the choice, taking risks, prolonged influence, binge-watching, and fascination with the criminal mentality. The approach to quantitative research was used to collect data on 237 respondents.

According to the Social Learning Theory and Cultivation Theory, the research concludes that repeated viewing of psychological thrillers is linked to the increase of risk-taking behavior, interest in crime, and obsessive behaviour of media consumption. The findings indicate that viewers often internalize fictional behavior, do not distinguish easily between reality and fiction, and are morally ambiguous and desensitized.

Introduction

Background of the Study:

The Media is a critical factor in determining the type of society we have. It assists in informing people and plays an important role in human behavior especially when it comes to the thriller genre. Nevertheless, there are subgenres that are called psychological thrillers and include suspense, drama, psychological manipulation, and unpredictable storylines that cause a certain sense of tension among the audience. This type of literature pays direct attention to the behavior and mental condition of the characters, their psychological suffering and inner conflict.

The psychological thriller movies possess some key features that distinguish them among other genres. A single element is the mental instability of the lead actor whose erratic behavior and inadequate insights bring the tension and mystery. These films also contain characters who are challenged to face unsafe situations at physical and psychological levels.

The other essential element is the use of misdirecting and unreliable narration, in which turns, visualizations, or controlled viewpoints obscure the boundary between reality and fiction, which makes the audience always wonder what is real (Smith, 2024) and what is fictional.

Psychological thrillers have attracted several viewers over time, owing to their complicated plot lines and characters. Such movies tend to search the topics such as moral conflicts, manipulation, violence, and vengeance. Whereas, they are not only entertaining, they highly involve audiences by affecting their thoughts and actions.

This study is meaningful in determining the effects of media, in this case, psychological thrillers on the behavior of the youth. The dramatic tension of psychological thrillers may occasionally put the boundary between reality and fiction and pose a risk of audience replicating the violence acts or getting behavioral problems (Sakhuja, 2023). The psychological thriller films keep the audience on their seats because of their suspenseful plots, which makes them inquisitive and they find the need to remain to the end. These films appeal to their subjects through the suspense aspect to set a trend in social media and evoke emotional appeal among viewers (Yang, 2024)

Their popularity encourages viewers to watch them, attracting a larger audience and fostering binge- watching behavior that ultimately affects individuals' mental health. Researches show that Individuals with binge-watching behavior are more likely to be affected by depression because depression makes people want to escape their current

state of frustration and consume more TV to release this pressure (Sun & Chang, 2021). Conversely, movies with manipulative storytelling and suspenseful elements provide a mental escape, which can ultimately lead to an addictive pattern of repeatedly watching a specific genre.

The continuous exposure to high-intensity narratives reinforces their engagement, making them more likely to crave similar content over time, which eventually contributes to the Dopamine Remuneration Framework, where suspense and plot turns trigger dopamine discharge, driving to addictive binge-watching behavior. As said by (Sakhuja, 2023) "Watching thrillers and true crime, where your mind is employed all the time to figure out what will happen next, or where the story is going, results in a big surge in dopamine." Additionally, it has been found through research that, "Each time a plot twist or a cliffhanger unfolds, our brain releases a burst of dopamine, the neurotransmitter associated with pleasure. Our brains become conditioned to crave that rush, making pausing and walking away difficult (Brown and White Editorial Board, 2024)

Individuals' preferences for film genres are often shaped by their emotional responsiveness and cognitive engagement. While some individuals are drawn to movies that evoke strong emotions, others prefer films that challenge their intellect. According to (Zwicky, et al., 2024), individuals with low responsiveness to emotional stimuli, such as fearful or angry expressions, are more inclined to seek out movies that engage them on a cognitive level rather than an emotional one.

This is especially noticed in crime and psychological thrillers whereby the viewer is urged to join the dots instead of feeling deep emotions. Equally, audiences are more inclined to watch movies that provoke intellectual stimulation instead of strong emotions. Rather than being engulfed in terror or excessive feelings, these people derive pleasure in solving complex puzzles and untangling complex plots in stories about fiction.

The media have over the years been transformed into a force to influence the norms, attitudes and behaviors of the society. As it is reported by (Sakhuja, 2023), people who commit terrorism are often motivated or inspired by documentaries of true crime or materials of violent thrillers. Although psychological thrillers can also improve the critical thinking process by making audiences part of intricate stories, studies have also indicated that with time characters develop desensitization and maximize aggression, as a result of exposure to the violent nature of films. According to (Bushman, 2024), a major increase in the theme of murder and killing in films across all genres was discovered over the last 50 years, and such exposure has the potential to affect the way viewers perceive

violence and social relationships. This research highlights the importance of conscious media usage especially to younger audiences to reduce possible adverse impacts.

This research is dedicated to the establishment of the ethical media practices and media literacy where viewers can differentiate the reality and fiction. In the era of media-driven society, the genre has turned out one of the most popular and influential. Psychological thriller characters are generally obsessive of someone, something or a thing. This addiction may cause serious and uncontrollable behaviors, which emphasizes the dark side of the human mind.

In psychological thriller films, characters frequently work in the grey area of morality and it is difficult to tell what is right or wrong. The concept of reality is often exploited by this genre through deception, hallucinations, or misperceptions and the line between fact and fiction is often blurred. Consequently, viewers can feel confused and uncertain (Hellerman, 2024).

According to the research conducted by psychology professor Jeff Zacks, a complex neurological process is performed in the human brain involving various parts, enabling a person to become engrossed in a movie. These mental processes are associated with emotions, memory, and sensory perception, which is what produces an impression that viewers experience is an eyewitness of the events on the monitor.

Moreover, studies indicate that extreme responses to some scenes of the movie are a natural phenomenon because the brain treats filmed scenes as real-life experiences. Real world examples can prove this phenomenon because of the influence films can have on brain activity and perception change.

There are psychological thrillers that influence cognitive behaviors of children to a great degree and shape their way of decisions. A number of studies have established that violent movies are harmful to adolescents as they promote risky behaviors and diminish their capacity to manage themselves. The article investigates how exposure to these movies further undermines the decision-making and self-regulation of adolescents, favoring risky behaviors and the loss of impulse control ability, eventually resulting in worse judgment and decision-making (al., 2022).

The incentive to this study has two important sides. To begin with, an increase in media-based imitation crimes and psychological vulnerability of the youth viewers. At this point when their minds and emotions are still developing, over exposure to violent content without the right context may confuse their senses and reality and fiction and thus they will be more easily swayed to imitate. Films that have unsuitable scripts and romanticize

violence have harmful effects on the decision-making of adolescents, lowering their self-regulation and exposing them to risky behavior (al., 2022).

The second large reason is the wider social interest on the moral accountability of media creators. Although films are created with the main purpose of entertainment, they affect the audience psychologically on a deep level, especially the viewers who are both not mature and media literate to view films critically.

Taking into account all these, the study is motivated by a personal desire to study the psychological implications of the psychological thriller movies on young people as well as a social issue regarding the role of media in creating the perception of crime and morality. In this way, by investigating these problems, it can contribute to greater academic understanding and create more awareness among people, and, eventually, make them become more responsible in consuming media.

The Rationale of the Study

The influence of media on human behavior is an issue of numerous discussions, and the psychological thrillers with their strong narrative and ethically unclear characters may affect human emotions, thinking, and even behavioral patterns. According to the study by media psychology, there is a possibility of an increased anxiety reaction, desensitization to the violence or even fascination with criminal acts after a long term exposure to suspense and psychologically complex content. Nevertheless, as much as these effects are broadly debated, a lot remains to be said as to whether these films directly influence real life decision making and ways of behavior among the youths.

Several theoretical perspectives support the argument that media, particularly psychological thrillers, can influence human behavior. According to (Walker, 2020), psychological thrillers affect readers' expectations and perceptions through emotional tension, unpredictable narrators, and plot misdirection. Split time frames and mentally ill narrators are two examples of techniques that make the audience question reality and develop strong emotional attachments to individuals whose realities are warped. The audience can be profoundly engaged by this immersive experience, particularly young minds are more susceptible to impressions. However, Bandura's Social Learning Theory further suggests that "people observe behavior either directly through social interactions with others or indirectly by observing behaviors through media. Actions that are rewarded are more likely to be imitated, while those that are punished are avoided". Furthermore, recent research based on these viewpoints (al. C. H., 23) highlighted a concerning pattern in psychological thrillers: the common

misinterpretation of mental illness. Filmmakers frequently compromise reality in the name of drama and entertainment, sensationalizing or stigmatizing behavioral issues. In addition to creating public misunderstandings, this can also be prevalent or glamorize harmful behaviors where they are depicted with no consequences. Moreover, the studies indicate that the audience often fails to recognize psychological thrillers or misinterprets their core concepts, which implies an even broader misconception due to such false images. Such difference in academic opinion illustrates the necessity of more specific study of the way of how psychological thrillers influence the behavioral trends of the young audience.

This research is aimed at filling a serious knowledge gap in current literature because it particularly examines the behavioral changes that psychological thrillers can cause in children.

Problem Statement

Although the power of the media is indeed a well-researched topic, the particular impact of psychological thrillers on the behavioral patterns of the youth in real life is a comparatively under researched phenomenon. The existing literature states that watching suspenseful and psychologically stimulating stories could boost emotional responses, influence cognitive activities, and in some cases, desensitize toward violence or encourage risky acts.

This study examined the impact of psychological thrillers on decision-making, behavioral tendencies and risk assessment of young people. By studying how the audience reacts and trends in behavior, this research explains whether these movies are mere entertainment or they cause real psychological and behavioral change.

Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following research objectives:

To explore the influence of psychological thriller movies on the real life patterns of youngsters, their decision making.

1. To examine the extent to which psychological thrillers impact on risk-taking tendencies in young people.
2. To determine whether binge-watching psychological thrillers is contributing to the emergence of addictive media consumption habits and mental health challenges such as anxiety or desensitization to violence.

Research Questions

In reference to the research objectives, the following questions are investigated in the study:

RQ1: What are the impacts of psychological thriller films on the real-life decision-making pattern of youngsters?

RQ2: What is the effect of psychological thrillers on the risk-taking tendencies among young people?

RQ3: How is there a connection between binge-watching psychological thrillers and addictive media consumption?

Literature Review

Review of Related Literature

The psychological influence of media especially movies has been a topic of extreme scholastic analysis over the years. Multiple researchers have studied the way the content of films, particularly of such kinds as psychological thrillers, influences the way of human thought and behavior in the real world. The psychological thrillers and their effects on behavior especially in young audiences are a fairly under-researched area of literature though has been empowered by the growing concern regarding the influence of the media on youths. A genre characterized by complicated plots, tension, suspense and ambiguous morality, psychological thrillers have posed a critical question concerning whether they can affect the psychological and behavioral growth of the youth. The review discusses major studies and theories that both affirm and disaffirm the claim that psychological thrillers affect youth behavior and decision-making.

Researchers indicate that thrillers attract due to the extreme fear and terror they bring, counterbalanced by the rapturous relief at the conclusion (Sakhuja, 2023). Such films are full of suspense and violence, arousing a dopamine rush that causes viewers to demand more. Nevertheless, excessive listening to such genres may also negatively impact mental health, and even present a possible danger to psychological impact, some people may wonder whether these pieces can have any impact on their behavior

The psychological thriller films attract a great number of people as they want to find the solution and discover some hidden sides of the story and this makes the films exciting and curious. This usually causes viewers to watch movies longer where viewers lose track of time and sit there until the movie is over, a state of viewing that is better known as binge-watching. Although binge-watching may provide a temporary relief of stress, it might eventually result in the development of guilt and higher levels of anxiety as a result

of avoidance of real-life responsibilities. Also, a lot of individuals might revisit previously seen programs to feel a sense of control and comfort because the predictability allows alleviating the emotional stress. Therefore, binge-watching is a type of escapism and coping mechanism among many (Brown and White Editorial Board, 2024).

Due to the addictive quality of binge-watching these movies can lead to adverse mental health, (sun and Chang, 2021) discovered that problematic binge-watching is positively correlated with depression, social interaction anxiety, and loneliness. Moreover, the connection between problematic binge-watching and increased risks of social interaction anxiety was also mentioned by the study. The research conducted by (sun & Chang , 2021) included 1,488 adults aged 20 years and older, who had taken an online survey. There were numerous scales in the survey to assess binge-watching behavior, depression, social anxiety, and loneliness. The findings revealed that the more problematic binge-watching occurred, the greater the levels of depression, social anxiety, and loneliness.

Of particular concern is the depiction of morally ambiguous characters. As (Hellerman, 2024) elaborates, characters in psychological thrillers tend to work in grey zones, whereby it was challenging to distinguish what was right and wrong. This moral ambiguity puts the viewer in a conflict with judging the morally correct behavior of the characters, and some viewers absorb the distorted world outlook of the characters. Moreover, psychological thrillers often distort the stories to confuse and bring an element of doubt to reality and fiction, making it difficult to define what is true or false in the eyes of a viewer (Smith, 2024)(Sakhuja, 2023).

Nevertheless, (Smith, 2024) carried out a research concerning the representation of mental illness in psychological thrillers, which are mostly portrayed negatively, and the study ultimately affects the general opinion. The research targeted four mainstream psychological thrillers that are well read, and in which mentally ill characters are depicted to commit violent acts, thus, perpetuating negative stereotypes surrounding mental illness. It was concluded that these negative depictions add to the stereotype of the violent mentally ill, which leads to fear and stigmatization. This worsens how mentally ill people are treated and how isolated they feel even with relatively mild cases.

Additionally, when a person chooses a specific genre, it usually indicates his or her own interest and mental activity as his or her brain is automatically attracted and demands such material. This decision- making process is affected by their cognitive tendencies. In line with this, (Zwiky, et al., 2024) emphasized the close connection between the preferences that individuals have towards particular movie genres and how these brains

react to negative emotional stimuli. Their study highlighted that media preferences do not apply to all, but according to the individual neural reaction of each individual.

A research conducted by (al., 2022) concluded that the exposure to violent films resulted in risky choices, i.e., adolescents are more likely to make dangerous or poor decisions. In addition, violent content largely diminishes behavioral restraint, leading to the loss of control over the impulse.

They also initiated a study that established that violent attentions escalated risky decision-making among adolescents by a significant margin ($P < 0.05$). Further, violent films resulted in a considerable reduction in behavioral inhibition, i.e. adolescents could less control impulse behavior ($P < 0.05$). Their design was quasi-experimental that used pretest-posttest design with a control group. It included 60 teenagers (30 males and 30 females) in Tehran Iran. Sampling was done on the available participants. To gauge the influence of violent films, the Iowa Gambling task (to determine risky decision-making) and Go-No-Go task (to determine the behavioral inhibition) were employed. The findings demonstrate the detrimental role of films which celebrate violence, predisposing the adolescents to high-risk behavior and reduced self-control.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework of the research is based on the Social Learning Theory, Cultivation Theory, and the Dopamine and Reward System to understand how psychological thrillers can affect the imitation of behavior in youth viewers. These theoretical approaches offer a complex view of media effects, combining psychological, sociological, and neurobiological explanations of how repetitive exposure to thrillers can create behavioral, perception, and decision-making patterns in young people.

Social Learning Theory

It has been used to explain how violence is learned through media. The theory suggests that children can adopt aggressive behaviors by watching violent TV shows, movies, or video games.

One of the best-known experiments in the history of psychology involved a doll named Bobo. Bandura demonstrated that children learn and imitate behaviors they have observed in other people. The children in Bandura's studies observed an adult acting violently toward a Bobo doll. When the children were later allowed to play in a room with the Bobo doll, they began to imitate the aggressive actions they had previously observed. Observational learning involves changes in the observer's behavior after viewing others directly or through films, television, books and other media.

Psychological thrillers often depict manipulative, deceptive, violent, or risky behaviors that are rewarded within the plot (e.g., outsmarting others, achieving revenge, escaping punishment). Young viewers, who are at a critical developmental stage, may internalize these behaviors through observational learning.

- Watching protagonists or anti-heroes who succeed through manipulation or violence can normalize these behaviors.
- Repeated exposure increases the likelihood of imitation, particularly when the character is glamorized or portrayed as clever and successful.

Thus, Social Learning Theory provides a strong foundation for understanding how young people might unconsciously absorb and mimic behaviors portrayed in psychological thrillers. Bandura's Social Learning Theory supports the idea that psychological thrillers can indirectly shape youngsters' real-life behaviors by providing "models" of action that viewers may observe, mentally rehearse, and eventually act out and also investigate how these portrayals lead to imitative tendencies, particularly in terms of copying risky or antisocial behavior seen in psychological thrillers.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory relies on the long-term effects of media exposure on the views, opinions and perceptions of the viewers in contrast to the theories that investigate the short effects of media (perera, 2023). The hypothesis does not purport that a single violent film will make a person violent. Instead, it suggests that with time, people may more or less change their perception and response towards real-life things, like crime, deceit and revenge after being bombarded with repetitive themes or messages like that.

Shaping Perceptions of Crime and Morality

Psychological thrillers tend to cast complicated characters who work in grey ethics. In other cases, villains may be painted as the victim of the situation, and this may make the viewer confused about what is right or wrong. Cultivation Theory states that constant exposure to such stories can potentially create a society that views moral challenges vaguely and where criminality is sometimes justified or even commended.

In some movies, some people are depicted as having spiral into violence as a reaction to societal rejection. Although the movie may not be encouraging crime, under the guise of watching without any doubt, you may end up being more accepting of violent acts. This can be manipulated to make some viewers, especially young people, redefine dangerous acts as normal or understandable in real-life situations.

Increased Fear and Perceived Victimization

According to Cultivation Theory, when young people are exposed to crime and violence on a regular basis, they might also develop an impression that they are always at risk of becoming a victim. Psychological thrillers often revolve around themes such as stalking, betrayal, kidnapping and murder and are often about ordinary individuals being dragged into appalling situations. As a consequence, young audiences can be anxious, socially disengaged, or hypervigilant. Put in another way, individuals might start to view the world as a more threatening place than it is especially when they live in urban areas that are already marked by instability or insecurity.

Copycat Behavior and Blurred Reality

The cultivation theory supports the idea that repeated exposure to the media may in some way normalize certain behaviors. Regular viewing of psychological thrillers by young viewers can create the impression of a technique of manipulation, lying, or killing people to solve a problem as a legitimate method and not a feature of extreme fiction. This is especially necessary in the circumstances of copycat crimes, where individuals imitate the exact methods they see in the film or television programs.

Cultivation theory describes how media are able to generate a conceptual frame through which such activity may appear less outrageous or even less threatening, but not why someone would engage in a copycat crime in the first place. This is of particular concern to the youngsters, as their brains are still developing, and they may not fully realize the consequences of such actions.

Media as a Teacher of Social Norms

One of the media that act as teachers is the psychological thrillers. It defines what is seen as right or heroic, sets examples, and demonstrates results, or the lack of results. The cultivation theory argues that by watching certain actions and observing them more often, the audience can start to internalize them as valid problem-solving solutions to real life situations, i. e. disciplinary action or justifiable criminal behaviour. Youth are especially susceptible to these messages due to their underdeveloped beliefs and social norm knowledge.

Cultivation Theory is an important perspective to understanding the behavioral and psychological impact of psychological thrillers among young viewers. It shows how the views of crime, morality, and the surrounding world of viewers may be biased through the long and repeated exposure to violent and ethically complex narratives. By including this idea in your thesis, you will be able to offer a deeper discussion of the role of media on young minds not immediately, but with time. In this theory,

psychological thrillers can slowly desensitize the minds of young audiences, undermine moral boundaries and promote the idea of immoral or illegal actions being viable solutions to unfairness or confrontations. **Theoretical Contribution:**

This study takes a theoretical and practical approach in an effort to comprehend the behavioral and psychological processes that drive the teenage media effect. In order to provide a more thorough explanation of imitative behavior, this study combines long-term (cultivation), and observational (social learning) perspectives. Many previous studies have concentrated on the short-term effects of violent media. The most productive earlier research has frequently stayed inside a particular field, such as psychology, sociology. By combining several ideas, this study fills that knowledge vacuum and offers a more sophisticated examination of the ways in which psychological thrillers influence behavior and thought.

Furthermore, the psychological thriller genre has not received as much attention in this regard as action or horror genres, although the violence of these genres has been widely studied. This research provides new insights by focusing on the narrative peculiarities of thrillers, i.e. the protagonists who are morally ambiguous, the ambiguity, and emotional tension.

Methodology

Research Design

The quantitative method is applied to this research. Primary data were collected through the use of cross-sectional survey method amongst students aged 16-27 years. An acceptable, self-administered questionnaire was employed to assess the media viewing habit and self-reported psychological and behavioral responses to thriller content among the participants.

Population

The study population will be the students of colleges and universities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, aged between 16 and 27. Due to their higher access to streaming services, high levels of media consumption, and sensitivity to development, this age group was selected. The male and female adolescents were included, which offered a gender-neutral perspective.

Sampling

The researchers targeted students that are avid consumers of psychological thrillers and employed a non-probability purposive method of sampling. To provide diversity in

academic background and exposure levels, the participants were chosen in diverse universities and colleges situated in Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Among the 258 responses collected, 237 of the responses were declared to be valid, and they were entered into SPSS to be analyzed. Besides reflecting a broad group of students that qualify as inclusion criteria, with their age of 16 to 27 years and recent viewing of psychological thrillers, this sample size is sufficient to test statistically.

The necessity to only include those who have had relevant media exposure justifies the use of purposive sampling, which makes the sample extremely specialized to the research issue.

Operational Definitions

The following important concepts are defined practically to preserve understanding and measurement accuracy:

Psychological Thrillers: Films characterized by suspense, psychological manipulation, moral dilemmas, and emotionally intense narratives.

- **Real-Life Behaviors:** Respondents stated thoughts, feelings, or behaviors that show how exposure to psychological thrillers has influenced or changed them.
- **Paranoia:** Using Likert-scale responses, paranoia is defined as feelings of distrust or mistrust toward other people.
- **Insomnia:** Self-reported sleep difficulties linked to psychological thriller viewing are known as insomnia.
- **Hyper-vigilance:** Excessive caution or awareness, as expressed in self-assessment.
- **Altered Moral Reasoning:** A change in moral judgments brought about by how crime and morality are portrayed in suspenseful novels.
- **Media Exposure:** The frequency and length of time spent watching psychological thrillers, as indicated by the number of hours per week and the kind of material viewed.

Instruments

A structured questionnaire was used as a primary data collection tool and it consisted of:

- **Demographic Section:** Age, gender, and academic background.
- **Media Consumption Habits:** The type of content ingested and the frequency of thriller viewing.
- **Behavioral Indicators:** Questions that evaluate behavioral, emotional, and cognitive responses, such as changes in sleep, moral judgment, social perception, and criminal characters interest.
- **Measurement Scales:** Will be mostly 4-point Likert (e.g., 0 = Disagree to 3 = Strongly Agree; 0 = Never to 3 = Always) with uniform data to work with in statistical analysis.
- The questionnaire was created following literature review and piloted on a small sample to determine the clarity, reliability and validity.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of the structured questionnaire was done using IBM SPSS Statistics 20. The statistical methods that were employed to examine the relationship between behavioral outcomes in teenagers and exposure to psychological thrillers included the following methods.:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** To give a summary of the demographic characteristics of the participants, media usage habits, and behavioral tendencies measurements such as frequencies, percentages, and means were used.
- **Computed Variables:** Risk-taking, binge-watching, and decision-making are just some of the many variables that were computed, by combining items related to the Likert scale; however, into single indexes. These calculated scores allowed a closer analysis of complex behavioral constructs by creating the means that signify an overall tendency of a participant towards a particular feature.
- **Correlation Analysis:** Pearson correlation was applied to explore the nature and intensity of the correlations between the main variables like the regularity of watching psychological thriller movies and the decision-making or crime or risk-taking changes.

Results

The results indicate that most participants (41.4%) fall within the age group of 19 to 21 years old and secondly, the age group of 16 to 18 years old (27.4%). This means that the sample of the survey mainly consists of young individuals in their late teens who are just in the university.

According to the data, 152 respondents were female, which constitute 64.1% of the sample, and 85 respondents were male, which constitute 35.9 percent of all valid responses.

As it is shown, the highest percentage of participants, 89 people, or 37.6% mentioned they spend four to six hours a week watching psychological thrillers. This means that the level of participation of the responders is usually moderate and this could suggest normal and consistent consumption.

Additionally, a significant proportion (27.8) contains 66 people who spend between 1 to 3 hours a week, 54 (22.8) people watch between 7 to 9 hours per week, which represents a more serious level of interest and investment. Interestingly, 28 respondents (11.8%) claimed to watch ten or more hours a week, which might reflect a case of binge-watching or passionately viewing. Research confirms that almost 5.9 percent of the surveyed individuals are frequent viewers of psychological thrillers (9 or more hours a week), whereas close to half (46.8) watch them 02 hours.

People most often, 88 people (37.1%), replied that they were only vaguely aware of psychological thrillers, which means that they slightly knew about the genre but did not

grasp it in-depth. As a contrast, 66 respondents (27.8) claimed to be very informed, which showed a good knowledge of the concepts and contents of the genre. Moreover, only 22 participants (9.3) said that they were very knowledgeable, which they were an expert-level or passionate viewer, and 61 individuals (25.7) said that they were only fairly familiar, meaning that they had moderate knowledge.

The statistics show that there is an overall level of familiarity with the genre and that only 9.3% of people indicated that they were extremely familiar. This proves that despite the high profile of psychological thrillers, one may not be able to have in-depth understanding or a critical analysis of their concepts. The difference in high familiarity may have an influence on the moral lessons of the content that is being received or comprehended by the participants.

There were 110 participants (46.4) who answered all of them, which means that nearly half of respondents know psychological thrillers well and understand that these films often combine various possessions, such as crime, manipulation, mind games, suspense, tension and unpredictability. Manipulation, crime, or mind games were specifically identified as major elements by a good proportion of respondents (19%), which reflects the obvious association with the psychological complexity as well as tactical elements that often drive this type of plot.

On the contrary, 17.3% of the respondents chose tension or unpredictability, and a similar 17.3% chose suspense, which implies a tendency to enjoy the emotional and storyline appeal found in thrillers.

Reasons for Watching Psychological Thrillers

This table explores the motive factors that influenced the respondents to choose the psychological thrillers as their favorite genre.

Response Option	Frequency	Valid Percent
I enjoy suspense and unpredictable plots	136	57.4%
It helps me escape reality	26	11.0%
Out of curiosity	46	19.4%
Peer influence/recommendations	29	12.2%
Total	237	100.0%

Love of suspense and strange stories was the best-cited explanation, 57.4% of participants. It means that the intellectual stimulation and the thrill of unpredictable twists are the primary attractions, and the ability of the genre to attract the attention of viewers and make them think critically is emphasized.

Curiosity was an additional factor with 19.4% of participants indicating that the mysterious or intellectually intriguing nature of these films sparked their interest. 12.2% of respondents were indicated to be influenced by peer suggestions which shows that social influence and shared viewing experiences drive media choices.

It is also interesting to mention that just 11 percent of respondents answered that they watched psychological thrillers to escape, which implies that, as compared to fantasy or romance, thrillers are not usually used to relax or be diverted emotionally. Instead, they are chosen due to their ability to capture the attention of the viewers, the complexity of their stories, and the psychological insight they offer.

Statistics indicate the primary reasons (57.4) as to why most viewers watch thrillers are Plot twists and tension. Such audiences are likely to be driven by emotional stimulation and intellectual interest which indicates a dynamic consumption behavior of media. Just 11 percent of viewers claimed to watch to get away with reality, as is common with such genres as fantasy or romance.

This reinforces the claim that thrillers are immersive and provoke strong psychological responses and not merely an escapist media. These revelations draw a complex picture: such thrillers are just watched by people as a way of social validation and mental stimulation, not merely as a means of entertainment.

Fascination with Criminals, Villains, and Crime Planning

Here the answers of the participants will be discussed in terms of their interest in criminal characters, crime strategy, and the ideas whether psychological thrillers popularize crime or present villains as something attractive. This table shows four questions in the questionnaire that determine the way viewers react on villainous characters and criminal acts depicted in psychological thrillers.

It looks at the reaction of the participants to significant psychological thriller-related attitudinal statements but mainly focuses on the perception of criminal behavior, moral limits and cognitive involvement. The columns are divided into Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree, and each of these categories consists of various answers of participants. All the answers are based on 237-person sample size.

Most respondents (43%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the first statement that they find criminals in psychological thrillers fascinating or charismatic, which was a general reluctance or mixed views regarding the enticement of adversarial characters. Nonetheless, 31.7 percent of the respondents (Agree + Strongly Agree) indicated that they were somewhat fascinated, but 25.3 percent indicated disapproval. This shows how bad guys are depicted in the genre, which is ethically questionable. Things make me more intrigued in the planning of crimes by watching thrillers. The interest in crime strategy was high with 61% of the respondents agreeing and 46.4 percent strongly agreeing. Only 13.9% did not agree, which indicates that this part of thrillers is a major point of psychological thrill and interest.

"I occasionally find it fascinating how clever or cunning evil characters can be."

65.4% of respondents were highly curious and 49.4% agreed and 16% strongly agreed. This was considered as one of the most popular ideas in this field, and only 8% dissented.

This gives some validity to the idea that, despite their morals, villains in thrillers will often be described as intelligent, clever or emotionally resilient. **"Crime is normalized and less shocking in psychological thrillers"**. Here, too, there was a high level of agreement: 47.3 percent agreed, 11 percent strongly agreed. Nonetheless, 20.3% said disapproved and 32.5% were indifferent, meaning that not every person was affected in this way, which might be due to ethical filters or personal sensitiveness.

This section reveals the psychological interest that people have on criminals and deviance. Over 60 percent of those surveyed believed that crime planning was interesting, and 65.4 percent believed that villains were either clever or good manipulators.

This confirms the belief that morally suspicious characters are an attraction to the audience due to their complexity and cunningness, indicating some degree of desensitization. 47.3 percent of the respondents agreed with, which gauges whether or not crime has become more normalized, which indicates a certain level of desensitization. This means that the shock value is reduced, perhaps due to familiarity, although that does not establish an absolute moral conversion.

On the issue of criminal charm, it shows a mixed reaction with only 7.2% strongly agreeing and 43% indifferent. This reserved response suggests that the audience is intrigued by crimes, but may not always approve of it morally. The data reveal that despite making the likelihood of ethical ambiguity and cognitive dissonance in the audience, psychological thrillers can challenge the well-established moral standards and

spark the desire to rebel even though this might not necessarily lead to copying such actions.

Psychological and Behavioral Impact

Psychological responses and behavioral alterations including emotional states, risk-taking, restlessness, and sleep patterns of individuals after reading psychological thrillers are examined in this section.

Each of the five statements was rated by the respondents on a scale of four, namely, Never, Sometimes, Often, and Always. Each item had 237 valid responses. Through discussing aspects of immersion, emotional reaction, and habitual consumption in media, the following section seeks to understand how psychological thrillers influence viewers to respond in a manner that transcends the cognitive curiosity.

When asked whether they often lose track of time when watching psychological thrillers, many of the participants, 44.7% answered Yes, Sometimes and 21.1% often. This means that the level of psychological absorption is high having more than 65 percent of the viewers being said to have lost track of time as they are engrossed with the story. Since only 26.6% of the respondents said that they never had this experience, it is evident that watchers of this genre often develop deep media engagement as one of the cognitive outcomes.

Sixty-four point five percent of the interviewees answered the statement, "After watching intense thrillers, I become more daring, Sometimes, Often, or Always, which means that viewing thrillers can lead to the belief that one is more daring or confident. This is in line with theories of media arousal, which argue that intense media can temporarily enhance the feeling of adventure in an individual or lead to risky behavior. This effect is not universal among viewers, but it remains rather significant, as the percentage of those who selected Never is 35.4%.

The results show that there is a significant relationship between the media desire and withdrawal-like behavior and the comment, I feel restless when I cannot watch the next episode of a thriller. Among the surveyed, 77.2 percent admitted to being at least a little restless, with 42.2 percent reporting to be Sometimes, 21.1 percent reporting to be Often, and 13.9 percent reporting to be Always. It is a trend commonly associated with expectative dopamine-induced responses and binge-watching, which indicates psychological addiction or habitual consumption of the genre.

Conversely, only 24.5% of respondents (when aggregating the answers of Often and Always) admitted that they rewatched scenes of psychological thrillers featuring crime in

them, but over fifty percent (50.6) said Never and the other twenty-four percent (24.9) said Never. This is to indicate that re-watching behavior might actually be more selective or narrative-dependent, despite demonstrating interest in crime in other areas of the study, although it does not translate into the repeated viewing of specific crime scenes.

Finally, 36.7% of the participants claimed that they experienced difficulties sleeping when questioned whether watching thrillers late at night affected their sleep adversely. The proportion of them who replied with Yes was 29.1 percent and with No was 7.6 percent. However, 35 percent of participants chose never to answer, which means that attitudes to the watching of late-night TV are not unanimous. The latter observation highlights the effects of thrillers on the human body, particularly when they are seen immediately before sleep, and the difference in emotional and sensory responsiveness among individuals.

As indicated in this segment, psychological thrillers can lead to various behavioral and physical side effects on the viewers. Signs of deep involvement like time distortion, restlessness, and even disrupted sleep are popular among the participants. This pool of data gives testimony to the behavioral and psychological alterations, caused by the media. The variables of high engagement, such as restlessness and distortion of time, mean that viewers can be immersed in the content, and often lose sense of reality and time when taking it in.

The impatience when they cannot watch more shows the binge behavior and media dependency, as the style of the addictive narration of thrillers demonstrates. The fact that you feel bolder after watching may be an indication of temporal arousal effects which believe that media arousal influences real world actions and emotions. Sleep disruption suggests physiological effects, which may be caused by increased dopamine or anxiety after exposure. The decreased rewatching rates, however, suggest that viewing intensity is the factor that prompts the emotional impact but not recurrence.

Such findings reflect the strong influence of psychological thrillers on younger viewers and are in line with media psychology research on viewer engagement, mental interest, and emotional response, affirming their strong influence on viewer experience and possible habitual behaviors.

Viewer Perception of Characters and Ethical Portrayal

This section will deal with the perceptions of the participants regarding the authenticity of the content, the way it influences their attitude towards others, and the expectations of acting in an ethical way by filmmakers. In this table, the researchers explore the

evaluation of psychological thrillers by the viewers concerning personal reflection, ethical sensitivity, and realism. According to responses obtained, 237 subjects were requested to assess each of the five claims on a four-point scale, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly Agree. The research provided by her illuminates the extent to which viewers identify with the genre morally and ethically, as well as cognitively and emotionally.

The responses to the quote, Characters in thrillers seem real to me, were positive with 32.1% and strong with 7.2% persons and this shows that more than 40 percent of the respondents experience the character descriptions as highly realistic. Conversely, 29.1% disagreed and 31.6% were neutral which implies that the sensitivity of emotions, the feeling of character identification, or exposure to the genre may all lead to the perception of the level of realism of the characters. This combination suggests that even though certain viewers may see these people as being real and likable, others maintain some critical or even emotional distance.

One-third of the respondents (35.4% Agree + 8.9% Strongly Agree) admitted that they are more vigilant or distrustful of people after having watched thriller. Such shift in behavior proves the psychological influence of the genre as the issues of manipulation, lies, and uncertainty can affect social attitudes in reality. Even the 33.3% of the respondents who gave a neutral answer also suggests that this effect is not experienced by all of the audience members, even though it does exist.

The statement I have also wondered how I would behave in the place of the characters in thrillers was agreed upon by 40.5% with 14.3 having strongly agreed. The degree of imaginative involvement and empathic engagement is high as more than a half of the respondents actively placed themselves in the shoes of the characters. This is indicative of the immersive and suggestive nature of the genre and gives some validity to the theory of narrative transit, which is that audiences engage in the immersive and cognitive absorption of imaginary worlds.

When asked about ethical awareness in regard to the statement, Filmmakers should be cautious when depicting mental illness, a very large majority of respondents (43.9% agreed and 23.2 extremely agreed, or almost 67) responded affirmatively. This means that viewers expect mindful portrayals of mental illness without glamorizing or stereotyping. The fact that only 10.1 percent disagreed confirms that the majority of the viewers like accurate and sensitive depictions of mental illness.

Finally, 32.5% of the respondents stated that they agreed with the statement, I think

there is a deficiency in ethical responsibility in the creation of psychological thrillers, and 13.1% strongly agreed, which is 45.6, in total. However, 41.4% of the respondents said nothing, which could indicate the ignorance of the moral standards that support the media production. This shows how there is a need to increase media literacy and critical analysis of plots and messages of thrillers.

This paper illustrates the way in which moral and cognitive engagement with thriller material is established. The fact that the participants more than half of them acknowledged to have played in the shoes of characters serves as evidence of high narrative identification and emotional investment. This engulfing tendency is also justified by the fact that characters are real.

And 44.3% suspicious - stress the psychological effect thrillers can have, which alters interpersonal trust or makes them more alert temporarily. This is in line with cultivation theory, which argues that prolonged exposure can shape expectation or worldviews. The increasing audience responsibility and sensitivity to stigmatization is exhibited in 67.1% demand to be cautious upon presentation of mental health problems.

The findings of this section reveal that viewing psychological thrillers has a high level of ethical awareness and contemplation by the viewers. This implies that viewers are no longer passively receiving media but increasingly evaluating the impacts of media, which means that the importance of moral narration, realism in character development, and media literacy in content creation is becoming increasingly important.

Correlation between Exposure, Prolonged Viewing, Risk-Taking, and Binge-Watching

To examine the relationships between the main variables of the study, a Pearson correlation test was conducted upon the answers of 237 respondents with the help of SPSS. The analysis was aimed at evaluating the direction and strength of relationships among four significant variables, namely risk-taking tendency, exposure to thrills, long-term exposure, and binge-watching thrillers. The following variables were collected using the questionnaire. The Pearson correlation coefficient lies between -1 and +1; values nearer to 0 are suggesting non-existence of any connection whereas values nearer to +1 depict the existence of a strong positive connection. The statistically significant relationships below, at the 0.01 (2- tailed) level of significance, prove the strong correlation between these behavioral and psychological traits in the context of the psychological thriller consumption.

Variables	Exposure to Thriller	Prolonged Exposure	Risk-Taking Tendency	Binge-Watching Thrillers
Exposure to Thriller	1.000	0.343**	0.677**	0.459**
Prolonged Exposure	0.343**	1.000	0.616**	0.372**
Risk-Taking Tendency	0.677**	0.616**	1.000	0.432**
Binge-Watching Thrillers	0.459**	0.372**	0.432**	1.000

The Pearson correlation matrix was applied to evaluate the magnitude and direction of the relationships between the four variables of core variables in the study: Exposure to Thriller Content, Prolonged Exposure, Risk-Taking Tendency and Binge-Watching Psychological Thrillers. The value in each row of the matrix is represented as the correlation coefficient (r), which indicates the degree to which two variables are related. The fact that the output contains a double asterisk (**) implies that the correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), meaning that the correlation is a very credible relationship and not an accident. Correlation analysis gives some significant findings.

The best correlation was observed between risk-taking propensity and thriller exposure as it had a Pearson value of 0.677. This proposes that individuals with a tendency to frequently watch psychological thrillers have a higher chance of developing or displaying a risk-taking behaviour and thus a strong, positive and substantial relationship. The relatively significant positive relationship (0.616) between long-term exposure to thriller material and risk-taking tendency also indicates that it makes people more psychologically disposed to make risky choices and take interest in crime.

The exposure to thrillers was found to be moderately positively correlated with binge-watching behavior ($r = 0.459$), which means that the more often people are exposed to thrillers, the more they are likely to become compulsive and habitual watchers. Moreover, the risk-taking tendency was moderately and significantly associated with binge-watching ($r = 0.432$); those individuals, who are more inclined to engage in thrill-seeking behaviors, are also inclined to binge-watch.

The significant relationship ($r = 0.372$) between prolonged exposure and binge-watching also supports the idea that prolonged exposure can cause continuous consumption, which can result in media addiction. Lastly, the correlation between watching thrillers and extended exposure was lower than the rest of the correlations, but it was statistically significant with a strength value of 0.343. This supports the argument that

increased exposure is associated with increased watching time and possible obsessions.

The findings of the correlation analysis offer a sound empirical support to the study. These findings showed the existence of a strong statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.677$) that watching thrillers influences decision-making by inducing risk-taking behaviour. This agrees with other theories such as the Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasises media influence on behaviour as a result of observational learning, and suggests that frequent viewers will tend to form or participate in thrill-seeking and even impulsive decisions.

The significant correlations between long-term exposure and the risk-taking tendency ($r = 0.616$) and binge-watching ($r = 0.372$), that studies the impact of long-term exposure on an interest in crime. These findings confirm concerns in media psychology that desensitization and erosion of moral boundaries do occur and suggest that continued consumption of crime-themed or psychologically intense narratives stimulate interest in criminal behavior and lead to habitual viewing behavior.

Besides, exposure to thrillers is linked to risk-taking, which is confirmed by the large correlation between risk-taking and exposure ($r = 0.677$) and extended exposure ($r = 0.616$). This may be an indicator of some psychological feedback cycle where individuals seeking adventure are motivated towards such material, and their exposure to such material, in turn, reinforces or confirms these behavioral tendencies.

Finally, the positive correlations of the binge-watching with exposure ($r = 0.459$), longer exposure ($r = 0.372$), and risk-taking ($r = 0.432$), which argues that binge-watching thrillers does bring about media-related mental effects (e.g., addiction, emotional disorders). Specifically, in case of their over-view or absence of self-control, these correlations indicate the development of obsessive consumption behaviors, agitation, and other cognitive or behavioral consequences.

Discussion and Conclusion

The major aim of the research was to determine the effect of the content of psychological thrillers on the actual behavior of the youths, in this context, the choice of behavior, risk-taking behavior, and media consumption behaviors such as binge-watching. Unlike such genres as brutality or terror, psychological thrillers rely on less obvious techniques e.g. suspense, ethically grey characters and manipulation of mind, which, in time, can produce a slight yet considerable impact on the way viewers control their emotions and act. Through the application of the media psychology theory, such as the Social Learning theory developed by Bandura, Cultivation Theory by Gerbner, the present research

contributes to our understanding of these psychological effects.

Based on the results of frequency analysis, it was revealed that respondents experienced a high level of symptoms of time distortion, binge-watching character, and emotional restlessness, as well as expressed high interest in psychologically intensive content. As with previous studies that attribute such material to cognitive stimulation and emotional escapism, the proclivity was not necessarily towards entertainment but was instead a sign of liking intricate storylines and characters with difficult moral dilemmas.

Nevertheless, more than 80% of the participants indicated that they were more attracted and had to read mind-bending stories, compared to other genres. It was also found that behavioral consequences were additionally supported by Pearson correlation outcomes that depicted strong positive correlations ($r = 0.677$) between risk-taking behaviors and exposure to psychological thrillers. This will corroborate the theory of Bandura that viewed and romanticized behaviors, especially those reinforced by media, will be retained, rehearsed, and imitated implying that viewing thriller content will lead to an alteration in decision-making in real-life situations. This connection is also aligned with the empirical evidence regarding (Bushman, 2024) and (al., 2022) research which discovered that adolescents who had exposure to violent or manipulative material had lower behavioral inhibition and higher risk engagement.

In addition, Exposure to long term thrillers was also observed to correlate with a greater predisposition to dangerous or illegal behavior ($r = 0.616$). As Gerbner (1960s) proposed in Cultivation Theory, longer exposure to content of the theme may alter the way individuals view the world. Children who regularly observe instances of manipulation, betrayal or criminal behavior being rewarded or rewarded, may develop a distorted notion of these practices as good or right. It aligns with the previous studies by (Smith, 2024) and (al., 2022) who discovered that thriller consumers were growing increasingly moralized and blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction. Additional evidence of the cyclicity of thrill-seeking consumption and emotion regulation by media was the medium correlation between exposure ($r = 0.459$) and binge-watching; and between exposure ($r = 0.372$) and risk-taking propensity ($r = 0.432$).

These findings empirically support the results of (sun & Chang , 2021), which correlates problematic binge-watching with loneliness, depression, and anxiety symptoms. In addition, by showing that frequent viewers are desensitized and distort reality, the study supports the Cultivation Theory of Gerbner and explains how exposure to morally challenging narratives over time leads to normalisation of unethical behavior and

augmented perceived danger in the world, exemplified in the Mean World Syndrome. Notably, (Smith, 2024) analysis of the adverse imagery of behavioral issues in thrillers justifies the proposition that the plots not only promote the notion of making irresponsible decisions and engaging in addictive media use, but they also perpetuate the stigma of mental health disorders.

Combined, the descriptive and inductive statistical results are indeed an alarming pattern in young viewers behaviour, in which psychological thrillers were an immersive stimulus that governs moral judgement, emotional responses, and even real-life decisions. These findings point out the absolute necessity of media literacy education and moral narration in entertainment media targeted at young people.

The findings of this paper align with the past theoretical and empirical research. As Bandura argues, observational learning works best when the observed personality gets rewarded and is presented as desirable traits that most heroes in psychological thrillers share. Using the lens of cultivation theory, the gradual transformation of the views on morality and social reality among the viewers can be understood through the view of the gradual changes in the perception under the influence of repeated and prolonged exposure.

A this paper has employed a multifaceted approach to learn about the effects of psychological thrillers on young viewers. It provides new information to support moral, informed and moderate media interaction practices through the integration of media psychology theories, empirical evidence, and a socially relevant perspective. The findings demonstrate the need to take active steps to understand media consumption as a potential source of influence on young behaviour and identity formation, but not as entertainment.

Descriptive and inferential statistics indicate that a significant number of young individuals do not only frequently consume such content but also demonstrate the symptoms of psychological engagement, including the distortion of time, emotional agitation, and increased interest in risky and morally ambiguous stories.

The data supported Bandura theory which states that individuals, especially youths, learn through observation and imitate behaviour that are frequently reinforced on screen and demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between risk-taking behaviour and exposure to thrillers. The unstable moods and tension of psychological thrillers create a cycle of emotional desire and satisfaction. Emotional disturbance, mental depletion and sometimes a distorted sense of reality has been shown to be associated with this compulsive involvement.

Not only that, the findings of past studies, such as those by (sun & Chang, 2021) and (Sakhuja, 2023) indicate that watching such thrillers does not just become a form of entertainment, but it grows to be a behavioral habit closely resembling soft addiction. The statistically significant relationships between risk- seeking behaviour and binge-watching demonstrate an emotional and cognitive engagement that may threaten the psychological status of the vulnerable viewers. Moreover, the findings confirm prior studies by (Smith, 2024) on the possible adverse social perceptions and stigmas related to the representation of mental illness in thrillers.

The overall results of the study are that psychological thrillers are not value-neutral. Instead, they are engaging cognitive spaces that can change the perception of the viewers, stimulate the reproduction of abnormal behaviour, normalize moral ambiguity, and extend suffering, especially among young people who are already vulnerable. That is why this research raises valuable concerns among legislators, media producers, parents, and educators. It demands a review of the creation, consumption, and control of such content.

The study also contributes significantly to the growing literature on media psychology by offering a more detailed approach in an understanding of media impacts. It redefines psychological thrillers as motivators of behavioral adjustment as opposed to passive texts and can subtly manipulate the emotional limits, social cognition, and decision-making tendencies of the viewers.

This study is a call to action, urging more awareness, ethical content production and media literacy interventions that will help young viewers view psychologically intense material critically, as well as provide valuable scholarly commentary on a genre that has been largely overlooked in the empirical literature. Otherwise, these stories can cause psychological desensitization, increased emotional susceptibility, and the normalization of deviant behaviors in the youth category.

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