

Reflections Of Squid Game on Children's Games and Viewers; An Example of Twitter Sentiment Analysis and Qualitative Research

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Abstract

This research was constituted by taking advantage of the opinions of audiences and Twitter users about the Squid Game series, which has great repercussions in the world. Besides the fact that the content of the series consists of many remarkable details, it is also aimed to examine the effect of converting traditional children's games into a bloody image on the audience. In the interviews, the messages received by the audience from the series, the interpretation of the traditional children's games in the series, empathetic thinking, and the relationship of the audience with their families were discussed as reasons for watching Squid Game. The data obtained were transferred to the MAXQDA program and edited. The data used in the study were revealed in two stages. In the first step, sentiment analysis (attitudes, feelings, and evaluations) of 451,540 tweets between 10.17.2021 and 01.25.2022 collected from Twitter were conducted through MAXQDA software. Secondly, qualitative interviews were conducted with 13 participants who watched the Squid Game series, and the resulting transcriptions were edited and analyzed together with a field expert. Subsequently, all the emerging findings were interpreted aggregately. As a result, the tweets of Twitter users about Squid Game and most of the data collected during the interviews with 13 participants had similarities in parallel. The popularity of traditional children's games has increased thanks to this series, but with children and teenagers under the age of 18 watching uncontrollably violent scenes, the games of our childhood were combined with violence and transferred to real life. With the increasing prevalence of this situation, the display of the series has been banned in some countries. In addition, among the reasons for watching the series, the influence of social media and the multiplicity of tweets with positive sentiment content (131,359) because of the sentiment status analysis of Twitter users are noteworthy.

Keywords: Squid Game, Traditional Children's Games, Netflix, Twitter Sentiment Analysis

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**Squid Game'nin Çocuk Oyunlarına ve İzleyicilere Yansımaları;
Twitter Duygu Analizi ve Nitel Araştırma Örneği**

Öz

Bu araştırma, dünyada büyük yankı uyandıran Squid Game serisi hakkında izleyicilerin ve Twitter kullanıcılarının görüşlerinden faydalanılarak oluşturulmuştur. Dizinin içeriğinin dikkat çekici birçok ayrıntıdan oluşmasının yanısıra geleneksel çocuk oyunlarının kanlı bir görsele dönüştürülmesinin izleyiciler üzerindeki etkisinin de incelenmesi hedeflenmiştir. Yapılan görüşmelerde Squid Game'nin izlenme nedenleri, seyircinin diziden aldığı mesajlar, geleneksel çocuk oyunlarının yorumlanması, empatik olarak düşünceleri ve izleyicilerin aileleri ile olan ilişkileri ele alınmıştır. Elde edilen veriler MAXQDA programına aktarılmış ve düzenlenmiştir. Araştırmada kullanılan veriler iki aşamada ortaya çıkmıştır. İlkinde MAXQDA yazılımı aracılığıyla 17.10.2021 ve 25.01.2022 tarihleri arasında Twitterdan toplanan 451.540 tweetin duygu analizi (tutum, duygu ve değerlendirmeler) yapılmıştır. İkinci olarak Squid Game dizisini izleyen 13 katılımcı ile nitel görüşmeler yapılmış ve ortaya çıkan transkripsiyonlar alan uzmanı ile düzenlenerek analizi yapılmıştır. Daha sonra tüm ortaya çıkan bulgular bütünsel olarak yorumlanmıştır. Sonuç olarak, Twitter kullanıcılarının Squid Game ile ilgili attıkları tweetler ve 13 katılımcıyla gerçekleştirilen görüşmelerde toplanan verilerin çoğu paralel olarak benzerlik taşımıştır. Geleneksel çocuk oyunlarının dizi sayesinde popülaritesi artmıştır. Bu popülariteye rağmen 18 yaş altı çocuk ve gençlerin kontrolsüz olarak şiddet içerikli sahneleri izlemeleri ile çocukluğumuzun oyunları şiddet ile birleştirilerek gerçek hayata aktarılmıştır. Bu durumun giderek yaygınlaşması ile dizinin gösterimi bazı ülkelerde yasaklanmıştır. Ayrıca dizinin izlenme nedenlerinde sosyal medyanın etkisi ve Twitter kullanıcılarının duygu durum analizleri sonucunda pozitif duygu içerikli tweetlerin (131.359) çokluğu dikkat çekicidir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Squid Game, Geleneksel Çocuk Oyunları, Netflix, Twitter Duygu Analizi

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Introduction

The technological developments presented today provide individuals of all ages with the opportunity to access various platforms. One of these facilities is Netflix, a digital streaming service provider that is evaluated in entertainment media, offers its users the right to watch TV series and movies, and requires a member subscription (Netflix, 2020). It is reported that Netflix, the world's largest digital entertainment platform, has exceeded 200 million members since its foundation (databoks.katadata.co.id, 2021).

Squid Game, the blockbuster series of Netflix in 2021, is a South Korean drama in which children's traditional games are turned into a deadly race (Horn, 2021). It has had a successful launch on the streaming platform since its release in September. It has managed to occupy the top positions on the lists in more than 90 countries (The Guardian, 2021). This unprecedented viral shot presents the audience with an eerie world in which marginalized individuals are engaged in a battle of life against each other by playing traditional children's games (Mukarromah et al., 2022). It also reflected how debt-ridden individuals put their lives on the line to earn money and the story of how innocent games got blood-soaked they played as children, to society with a combination of all human emotions (Arkananta et al., 2021; Witera et al., 2021).

By looking at the impact of the coronavirus and its variations on the world, it cannot be associated only with health factors (Valaskova et al., 2021). With the decline of social activities, there has been a mass transition to the digital world (Fenwich et al., 2021). The increase in the number of accesses to social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, etc.) has caused many images to be shared online or offline by the audience (Costa, 2018). The Squid Game series has become a global legend and influenced the whole world thanks to social media (Siregar et al., 2021).

Despite the 18+ rating, easy access to the trending information on social media websites shows the inadequacy of the measures taken for children and adolescents (Vance et al., 2009). It is impossible to ignore the fact that these series, which affect psychological well-being and cause the adoption of negative behaviors such as anxiety, aggression, and depression, can impair the mental health of all segments of society (Hoge et al., 2017; Anderson et al., 2003). Individuals of all ages, who cannot discover the desired messages and values only when following the current trends, freely express their feelings directly or indirectly through social media (Mukarromah et al., 2022; Licoppe, 2004). Twitter, one of the most popular microblogging platforms that provide this freedom of expression, is of interest to many researchers because it provides an opportunity to collect data and conduct their analysis (Giachanou and Crestani, 2016). Due to the nature of microblogs, users argue about current events, do a bit, and express their complaints and their own thoughts in real-time (Agarwal et al., 2011). Twitter data provides an advantage over other data on how this situation or

event develops in real-time and how the experiences are reflected. Besides, unfiltered, and exactly transmitted feelings add value to this research.

A qualitative study was carried out to determine the sentiment analysis of Twitter users for Squid Game, Netflix's record-breaking series in the world, and in this context, to convey the reasons for watching the series and the reflection of traditional games from audience opinions. This study was designed based on the following hypothesis: The main ideas and messages that Squid Game audiences take from the series and the reflection of Twitter users' sentiment states are mostly parallel. In addition, the perspective of the Squid Game audiences on traditional children's games has changed.

The design of the study, in the light of the data obtained from interviews with individuals over the age of eighteen and Twitter users, draws the limitation of the study. If we also consider the audience who are under the age of seventeen and violent incidents in schools, creating a sample from the audience who are under the age of seventeen will allow us to evaluate the research to a more general degree.

Methodology

This research was conducted in two sections. In contrast to traditional data collection methods, it is constituted by analyzing the data collected via Twitter and the transcriptions of interviews with 13 individuals over the age of eighteen who watched the Squid Game.

In the first stage, Twitter data was queried and MAXQDA 20, a professional, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was used to download Twitter data. Although manual content analysis techniques are perceived to be better in terms of reliability and validity in analyzing each type of collected data, the process is thought to have progressed more transparently as the computer-assisted software (MAXQDA program) makes the results more reliable (Woods ve ark, 2016). The analysis process could be continuously reviewed, and the opportunity to organize the data clearly and systematically was also obtained thanks to this program. Tweets have been obtained by searching and using the hashtag "Squid Game" The MAXQDA software has been used to clean up the data by excluding retweets and tweets such as ads and spam. Only unique tweets were included in the study. Sentiment analysis (attitudes, feelings, and evaluations) was performed for later obtained data (Kaurav, et al., 2021). Sentiment analysis consists of the automatic determination of words using the SentiStrength software. Negative, positive, or neutral words and emojis are automatically detected by the software when analyzing. Values between +5 and -5 are saved. The emotions of individuals who tweet positively, slightly positive, neutral, slightly negative, and negatively are determined (Fakhreddine and Sánchez, 2021). During the dates 10.17.2021 and 01.25.2022, almost 700,000 twitter data were collected with the hashtag #SquidGame. About 250,000 of these data (including retweets, spam, irrelevant, and ads) have been removed from the system. Sentiment analysis of the

remaining 451,540 tweets was conducted. Since a maximum of 10,000 tweets can be retrieved from Twitter per day with MAXQDA software, more cannot be collected.

In the second stage, a semi-structured interview form prepared by the researchers was prepared and it is a case study. A content analysis was performed. Interviews were conducted with 13 people from the Squid Game audience. For each interview, the participant was informed, and interviews were conducted of their own free will. Upon request, assurance has been given that clear identity, and audio recordings and images will not be shared with exception of researchers. Some of the interviews conducted were converted into text simultaneously, and some were taken as audio recordings and converted into text. An interview with each participant was conducted within a period of 20-35 minutes. In the interviews, the messages received by the audience from the series, the interpretation of the traditional children's games in the series, empathetic thinking, and the relationship of the audience with their families were discussed as reasons for watching Squid Game. The data obtained were transferred to the MAXQDA program and edited. Transcriptions have been read many times and made ready for encoding and anonymized. Simultaneously with an inductive paradigm, transcriptions were encoded with two independent domain experts and prepared for inter-coder reconciliation. The encodings were transferred to the program and the Cohen's Kappa value was calculated. The purpose of calculating this value is to determine the percentages between the encodings of specialists in the field, eliminating the possibility of chance (Brennan & Prediger, 1981). Cohen's Kappa value ($\text{Kappa} = (\text{Po} - \text{Pc}) / (1 - \text{Pc}) = 0.81$) it is determined as 81%, and this is a valid value for qualitative research. Because (Banerjee et al., 1999) noted that for a perfect reconciliation beyond the chance factor, there must be an agreement of over 75%. Nevertheless, the coding was reviewed again with the field expert, and the 19% dispute was resolved and a 100% agreement was reached. In the analysis stage, themes and sub-codes were determined by creative coding. Then, the analysis was visualized using the Single-Case Model (Code Hierarchy) from the MaxMaps tab and its frequencies were added.

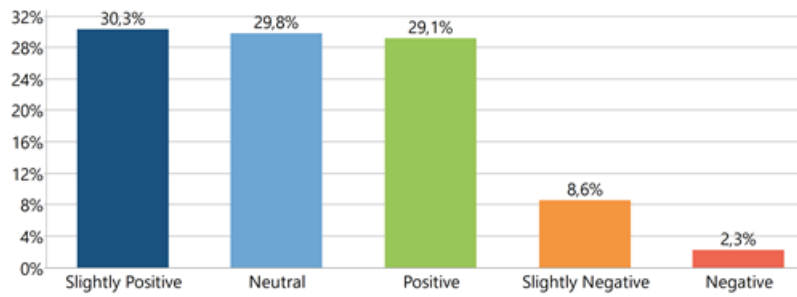
Ethical Principles

During the current research, “the Directory for Scientific Research and Publishing Ethics for Higher Education Institutions” were taken into consideration.

Findings

Figure 1

Twitter Sentiment Analysis



As can be seen from Figure 1, because of the sentiment analysis conducted, tweets containing 29.1% (131,359) Positive, 30.3% (136,731) Slightly Positive, 29.8% (134,492) Neutral, 2.3% (10,212) Negative, and 8.6% (38,746) Slightly Negative feelings were discarded by Squid Game audience about the series. A total of 451,540 Tweets were included in the study.

Table 1

Tweets Posted by Twitter Users about the Squid Game Series

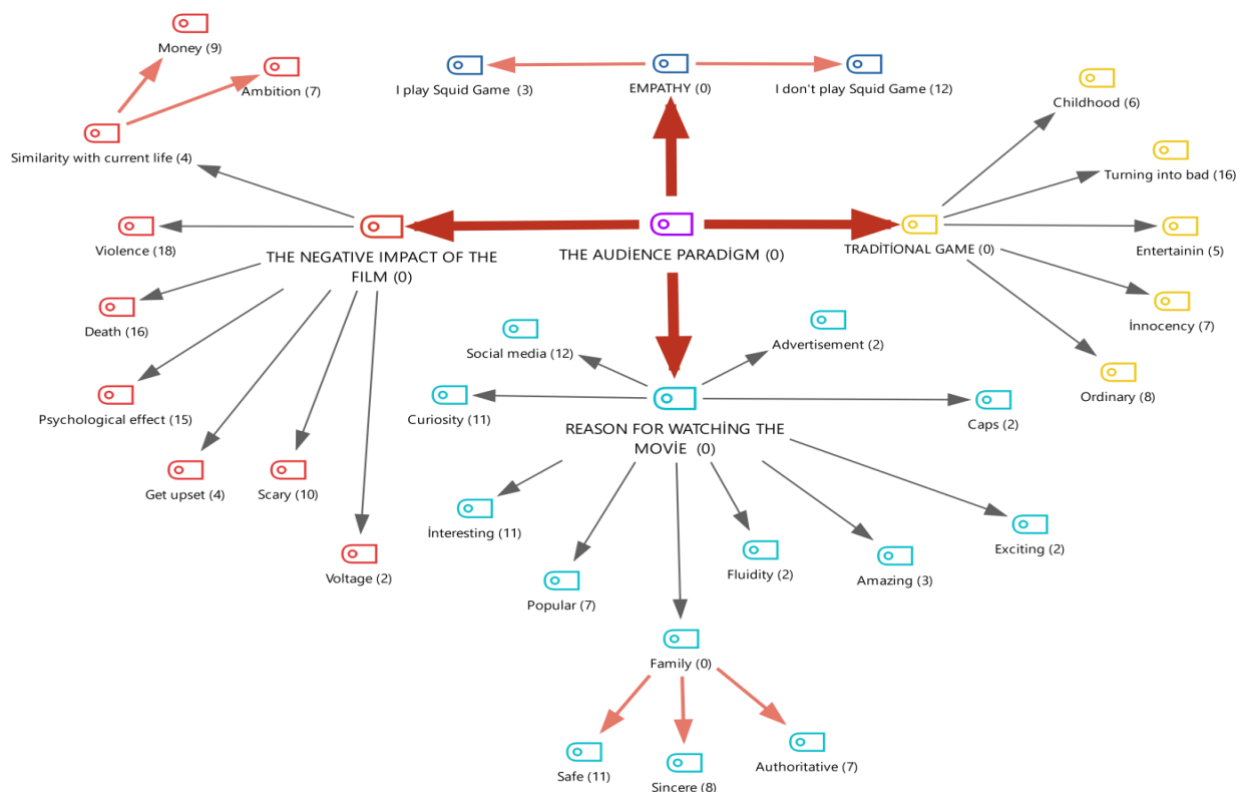
	Sentiment	Date-Time	Location	Tweets
1	Positive	10.17.2021 18:31:15	Plague Island	The problem schools have with Squid Game is that the games played are children’s games. There must be a way of reclaiming back the games rather than just banning them altogether. I’m thinking of simply renaming games &focus on the positives, & not the brutality of it.
2	Positive	10.17.21 18:00:05	Maine USA	One of the best of the year, of course! Squid Game is really addicting, and I watched it four times already. I really love it. I just feel kind of uncomfortable when people try to deny its quality or/and try to make everything about Squid Game. Equally annoying.
3	Slightly Positive	01.22.2022 20:02:06	Washington	I still can’t stop thinking about Squid Game! GOSH that was a good show. Part of me doesn’t want it to come back either because it stands alone so well. It ended SO perfectly. It will stand the test of time. But if the original creator had plans for multiple seasons, I’m with it!
4	Neutral	01.23.2022 21:43:18	Canada	1st Korean drama to make it to the 2021 Toronto International Film Festival. Became the world's most-watched Netflix series the day after its release, surpassing Squid Game. Supernatural, mystery, action, horror, fantasy, thriller, dystopia.
5	Neutral	01.15.2022 22:41:03	Texas	O Yeong-su Wins South Korea's First Golden Globe For 'Squid Game' RoleSouth Korean actor O Yeong-su won the country's first Golden Globe award on Sunday for his role in Netflix hit Squid Game, drawing cheers at home and abroad despite criticism for the
6	Slightly Negative	01.15.2022 22:05:53	Roma	My son’s teacher told me that the kindergarten class (the children) decided it was okay to recreate squid games. 5-year-olds coordinating a game like that has me BLOWED out the water. You are 5, go play a board game. I blame the parents.
7	Negative	01.15.2022 19:07:12	Barcelona, Catalonia	This picture is the result of a scribble from my child who is in elementary school, he is now 7 years old, and this picture is the result of my child's imagination while watching the squid game movie.
8	Negative	11.1.2021 22:04:49	Niederlande	I cannot get over all the news about elementary school kids beating each other up because of Squid Game. First, who lets

				their young kids watch a show about mass murder? Second, how crazy are kids watching that and then being like "yeah I wanna do that too"
9	Negative	10.30.2021 20:33:19	North Hollywood	So, I was just told by one of my regulars that her kids' elementary school banned Squid Game costumes... I'm not surprised in the least honestly. One of the worst things about working in a comic store was kids under 10 talking to me about the Game of Thrones sex scenes. Horrid
10	Negative	10.30.2021 19:30:06	New York	"Some children are trying to replicate show scenes at school... and we are seeing kids trying to actually hurt each other in the name of this 'game.'"

Table 1 includes sentiment states, dates, times, places where the Squid Game audience lives, and Tweets posted by the Squid Game audience

Figure 2

Single-Case Model (Code Hierarchy) Obtained from Interview Transcriptions of Squid Game Audience



As a result of the analysis of the data obtained from the Squid Game audience, four categories related to "empathy, traditional game, the negative impact of the series, reasons for watching the series" was established under the theme of the audience paradigm. The empathy category is encoded as I play if I am in the same situation, and I do not play such a game. The traditional game category is encoded as turn into evil, innocence, fun, ordinary, and childhood. The negative impact of the series is encoded as thriller, eerie, sad, psychological impact, death, violence, and similarity to current life (money, ambition subcode). Finally, when looking at the category of reasons for watching the series,

it is encoded as caps, ads, fluency, surprising, exciting, popular, interest, curiosity, social media, and family (safe, friendly, authoritarian subcode).

Table 2

Some Transcriptions of Interviews Done with the Squid Game Audience

	Participant	Date-Time	Transcription
1	Participant 3	10.18.2021 14:59:57	I was psychologically very impressed by the fact that they killed their opponents without blinking an eye and without pity. I felt sorry for every person who died. I've really fallen under the series. I think it is neither funny nor ordinary.
2	Participant 4	10.18.2021 18:20:56	It increases and enhances the feeling of violence. It is setting a very bad example. It is a series that is extremely dangerous, especially for young children, and leads people to bully.
3	Participant 5	10.18.2021 18:42	My reason for watching Squid Game is that I was curious because I was told that children should not watch, there are constant caps on social media, it is the subject of news, and jokes about being violent and containing different messages. I watched it to find out about it. I attribute the fact that the series has such a huge audience and popularity to all kinds of ads.
4	Participant 6	10.18.2021 22:53	It evokes tyrannous and cruelty rather than violence. It shows how far one can go. This is a terrible situation. There is a completely unmanlike plot.
5	Participant 7	10.18.2021 19:45	If I were offered 45.6 billion won, would I accept it? In my current situation, I would not. I am not a person who knows how to be content with what you have and who lives in these difficult conditions, and I am so touchy. I do not know what my answer would be if I were asked this question when I was a person living in these conditions.
6	Participant 8	10.18.2021 23:43	These games that we played as children were innocent. They were fun. We used to play for hours and come home at midnight. It would strengthen our friendship. But now, it reminds me of violence, ambition, and death.
7	Participant 10	10.19.2021 10:32	It is shown as a social structure in South Korea and is a criticism of the capitalist system and the brutality of this system, and even the possible dangers of capitalism.

Discussion

The professional creation of the plot has an impact on the fact that the Squid Game series has influenced a wide audience, and it is an undeniable fact that it was inspired by real-life human profiles. There is also a parallel approach when looking at the statements in the tweets and interviews of the audience. When the current life is examined outside the scenario, MyBankTracker, a personal finance site, conducted a survey with 200 readers on the dates between July 14 and August 7, 2015 (updated on November 29, 2021) on what extreme measures Americans would take to get rid of student loan debt. Interesting findings were obtained because of the survey. 55% of the participants stated that they could give up their personal privacy and participate in a reality show, 38% stated that they could be a subject in a questionable health study, and 30% stated that they could sell their organs in exchange for debt. When the statements of these people who have debts are examined, it is found that they have postponed many dreams about their future, home, car, and marriage. This research is an indication that people tend to give up their dreams and health over debts (McGrath, 2015; Mybanktracker, 2021). Another example is that the Bangladeshi poor sell their kidneys to pay off loans they take out for the struggle for life, and unfortunately, they can also get some of the promised money or risk their lives again by borrowing from loan sharks (Cousins, 2013). In this case, it cannot

be concluded that the script of the series is completely a figment of imagination. It can be said that the fact that risks that audiences take in their real-life influence the high rating of the series.

When the findings are evaluated, there is the sentiment analysis of the tweets sent by Twitter users and comments of the participants who watched the Squid Game series. As a result of Twitter sentiment analysis, tweets with positive feelings are more than the number of tweets with negative feelings. When looking at the content of the tweets, it has been mentioned in the tweets with positive feeling content that Squid Game is usually liked and watched many times, that the different plot is liked, that children's games are combined with such a series and popularized, and that there are real-life quotes. When looking at the tweets included in the analysis of negative feelings related to the series, striking situations stand out. Despite the presence of inappropriate situations (such as language, sex, violence, blood, weapons, suicide, nudity, and smoking) for individuals under the age of 17, an uncontrolled audience has been formed. After it was detected that three elementary schools close to Syracuse, New York (Fayetteville-Manlius School District), Castle Park School in Dalkey, Ireland, and schools in Panama City, Florida, also imitated violent games featured in Squid Game, it was decided to ban the clothes featured in the series on Halloween (USA Today, 2021; Cosplaycentral, 2021). There have also been tweets that the series has been banned from watching in many countries around the world. In fact, according to a variety report, a man who illegally smuggled a copy of Squid Game into North Korea, although it was forbidden to watch it, was sentenced to death, and according to the report, a student who watched the series received a life sentence, while some were sentenced to five years of hard labor. The teachers and principals of the students who watched this series were also fired from their jobs and exiled to work in faraway mines (Rfa, 2021). After students resorted to violence while playing children's games in the series, countries such as the United Kingdom, US, Belgium, China, Canada, Ireland, and North Korea banned watching the series as a precaution. It is a tragic action that the games included in the series were transferred to real life and removed from the fiction platform and put into practice. The discomfort of combining traditional games with violence was also expressed during the interviews. Perhaps the most entertaining games of our childhood have turned into violence. Games that remind of innocence, purity, and joy have now evolved into a sadistic memory by the audience of the series.

Considering the results obtained from this research and the research conducted on the subject in the literature (Mukarromah et al., 2022; Kermode, 2021; Cho, 2021; Sparks, 2021; Horn, 2021), the virality of social media is seen to have a great influence on the rapid spread and popularization of Squid Game. Based on Charles Darwin's classical theory of evolution, the message of "natural selection", that is, the termination of the existence of weak rings with the idea that the best takes its place in life is active in the series. In addition, it is reflected the fact that the elite segment who could not find the existence of real pleasure in life in their spare time and are satisfied with the suffering of

other people, turn the efforts to survive of the excluded, humiliated, and marginalized segments of society into entertainment in the series. In an interview, Mr. Hwang Dong Hyuk, the director of the series, talked about the need for people to think about why they live like this, whether the life we live in is a fair system, and who established this order (Wasim et al., 2022; Campillo et al., 2021). Although the presence of those who were objectively evaluated by the audience was considerable, unfortunately, violence, excitement, curiosity, and popularity overshadowed the philosophical dimension of the event.

Adolescent individuals devote a lot of time to aggressive, violent TV programs in their free time (Yoon and Somers, 2003). It is observed that the aggression levels of individuals who have been repeatedly exposed to violent videos have increased and their sensitivity to violent events encountered in current life has decreased (Huesmann, 2007; Bartholow et al., 2006; Funk, 2005; Maren Strenziok et al., 2010). In addition, it is envisaged that offensive and violent images in the media may be prevented due to the correct attitudes of the producers (Cantor and Wilson, 2003). However, when looking at blockbuster movies, TV series, books, video games, etc., it can be predicted that the priority of producers who want to have a good launch, unfortunately, is not social welfare.

When the studies conducted were examined in detail, studies were conducted on humans and infants, and it was found that they have an innate tendency to imitate the behaviors they observe in current life (Meltzoff and Moore, 2000). Neuroscientist researchers have identified "mirror neurons" that appear to promote these behaviors in primates (Rizzolatti et al., 1996). In the light of this information, it is envisaged that children who are directly or indirectly exposed to scenes of violence encountered in social life that appear in the media perform this action through imitation (Bushman and Huesmann, 2006). It shows parallelism with our research that children who are visually exposed to violent scenes in the Squid Game series resort to peer bullying by imitating these scenes. In Twitter data, tweets with negative feelings support the answers given by the participants.

In accordance with these studies that we have referenced from the literature, we can say that it is likely that individuals who watch the Squid Game series are being evaluated on a situation platform in the natural flow of life by observing a decrease in their sensitivity to violence. In such a case, it may be considered as a normal situation that the violent scenes of traditional children's games are taken as role models and put into practice in the countries where the series is aired. It can be claimed that peer bullying, effects on psychological well-being and happiness, and the adoption of a lifestyle contrary to universal moral rules because of the visuals poured into the audience paradigm on issues such as violence, anger, blood, grudge, hatred, death around the world.

As a result, when the tweets of the audience on Twitter about the series and the data obtained from the qualitative interviews are examined, it is noteworthy that there is integrity. The impression, it left on the audience about traditional games, and the similarity of the connection between the real

world and the script are among the reasons for watching Squid Game. However, there is a difference in a remarkable matter. Judging by the comments of Twitter users, it is an undeniable situation that they enjoy the violent scenes in the series. The series has become notable due to the presence of violent scenes. For an assessment that could not be deduced from the tweets, the participants in the qualitative study were also asked a question about their relationship with their families. Looking at the result, it is noteworthy that there are safe, authoritative, loving, and respectful relationships. The reasons for watching a series with such a degree of violence do not include the presence of a traumatic subconscious mind caused by domestic violence. Boredom due to the global pandemic, social media, caps, the uniqueness of the plot, the memories of children's games in our consciousness, the spread of the series among friends, and curiosity are the real reasons.

The fact that we are socially positively or negatively influenced by social media should not be ignored. The deep reflections of teenagers and children under the age of 18 watching such images are seen in this example. It is a work of tragicomic irresponsibility that they turn violence into entertainment. In this context, it is seen that serious measures should be taken regarding the use of social media and the internet. It is important that governments take a supervisory and informative attitude toward their citizens in the stage of not damaging sociologically universal morality. Parents should be informed about peer bullying. In addition, because the popularity of traditional children's games has come to the fore with violence, they have lost their innocence, and the scenes in the series have been taken as role models. In this context, bringing the use of social media to a more controllable level and developing projects, and making more effective, entertaining, development-oriented applications related to children's games will contribute to providing a positive educational opportunity to societies.

Contribution Content Declaration of the Researchers

The process related to the method and findings part of the research was carried out by the third author; the process related to the introduction part was carried out by the first and second author; the process related to the discussion and conclusion part was carried out by the first author.

Conflict Statement

The authors do not have a conflict statement regarding the research.

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