

# The Pornography of Violence on Social Media: A Reception Analysis on User Experiences in the case of the Ukraine-Russia War\*

Fatma ÖZTAT\*\*   
Selman Selim AKYÜZ\*\*\* 

## ABSTRACT

The relationship between the transmission of social reality in the media and the application of ethical rules is one of the important topics of discussion in the production and distribution processes of messages in mass media. With the emergence of social media, the effects of uncontrolled violent images on users are the subject of research. An important question is whether the publication of violent images leads to awareness or to the normalization or encouragement of violence. In this study, reception analysis was made in the context of the images of violence that spread uncontrollably on social media platforms in Turkey during the Ukraine-Russia War. Two violent images were shown to 13 participants with different demographic characteristics. The reactions and thoughts of the participants towards the images were revealed by semi-structured interview method. Most of the participants stated that the images were disturbing and that violence was not acceptable in any way. Most of the participants stated that watching the images of violence caused them to develop feelings such as sadness, fear, anxiety and pity as a result of empathy, that the publication of these images would not provide any benefit. A small number of respondents stated that they did not see a problem with resorting to violence in certain situations.

**Keywords:** Violence, Pornography of Violence, Twitter, Social Media, Ukraine-Russia War.

## Sosyal Medyada Şiddet Pornografisi: Ukrayna-Rusya Savaşı Örneğinde Kullanıcı Deneyimleri Üzerine Alımlama Analizi

### ÖZ

Medyada toplumsal gerçekliğin aktarılması ile etik kuralların uygulanması arasındaki ilişki, kitle iletişim araçlarında mesajların üretim ve dağıtım süreçlerinde önemli tartışma konularından biridir. Sosyal medyanın ortaya çıkmasıyla kontrolsüzce yayınlanan şiddet içerikli görüntülerin kullanıcılarda oluşturabileceği etkiler, araştırmalara konu olmaktadır. Şiddet içerikli görüntülerin yayınlanmasının, halkın haberdar olmasını mı sağladığı, yoksa şiddetin sıradanlaştırılmasına ya da teşvik edilmesine mi neden olduğu önemli bir sorudur. Bu çalışmada Ukrayna-Rusya Savaşı sürecinde Türkiye'deki sosyal medya mecralarında kontrolsüzce yayınlanan şiddet görüntüleri bağlamında alımlama analizi yapılmıştır. Şiddet içerikli iki görüntü, farklı demografik özelliklere sahip 13 katılımcıya izlettirilmiştir. Katılımcıların görüntülere yönelik tepkileri ve düşünceleri yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yöntemiyle ortaya konulmuştur. Katılımcıların çoğu görüntülerin rahatsızlık oluşturduğunu, şiddetin hiçbir şekilde kabul edilemeyeceğini ifade etmiştir. Katılımcıların büyük bölümü, şiddet görüntülerini izlemenin kendilerinde üzüntü, korku, kaygı, empati sonucu acıma gibi duyguların oluşmasına yol açtığını, bu görüntülerin yayınlanmasının bir fayda sağlamayacağını, haksızlığın ve zulmün duyurulması adına kullanılacaksa da pornografik olarak değil hassasiyet oluşturacak bölümlerinin gizlenerek yayınlanması gerektiğini ifade etmiştir. Az sayıdaki katılımcı ise şiddete belli durumlarda başvurulmasında sorun görmediklerini belirtmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Şiddet, Şiddet Pornografisi, Twitter, Sosyal Medya, Ukrayna-Rusya Savaşı.

### 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of violence and the origins of man's inherent curiosity about it have a very deep history. While gladiator fights first came to mind in the historical process on the curiosity of violence and

\* This study was approved by the decision numbered 2022/22 of the Scientific Ethics Evaluation Committee of the Faculty of Communication of Selçuk University.

\*\* Corresponding Author/Sorumlu Yazar, Dr. Res. Asst., Selçuk University, fatma.oztat@selcuk.edu.tr

\*\*\* Asst. Prof., Selçuk University, selmanselimakyuz@hotmail.com

Makale Gönderim ve Kabul Tarihleri/Article Submission and Acceptance Dates: 29.08.2023-14.11.2023

**Citation/Atf:** Öztat, F., Akyüz, S. S. (2023). The pornography of violence on social media: a reception analysis on user experiences in the case of the Ukraine-Russia war. *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 52, 352-367. <https://doi.org/10.52642/susbed.1351862>



the viewing of violence, the very difficult structure of today's digital world has opened the way for the pornography of violence to become ordinary (Erdem, 2020). Wars are the historical turning points in which violence is most intense. For this reason, the concepts of war and violence are often evaluated together.

For traditional media, wars are among the important news topics in the transfer of information. In particular, intense debates on the display of violence during wars are carried out in the context of media ethics within the framework of the questions "can images of war stop wars or is violence a commodity?" Woolf is not very hopeful that looking at war photographs will prevent war (Woolf, 2019).

It is foreseeable that visual documents related to the war can be used not only for anti-war sentiment, but also to increase anger towards the enemy. Images of war can be deliberately presented to incite partisanship, manipulate information about war, increase support for war, or win the support of other powers. At this point, Sontag's (2004) question is quite important: "*Do the perpetrators of violence and those who are subjected to violence lose their importance after a while and are we only left with violence?*"

The corpses of children dismembered by an explosion can be owned from both sides of the war with such an approach. While the headline and the explanation given to the news make the image unimportant, it can reveal new conflicts for geographies that are very sensitive. Violence against civilians, especially children, has historically resonated in different ways. During the war in the Balkans in the early 1990s, when Serbs and Croats were fighting, photographs of children who died due to the shelling of a village were included in the propaganda files of both Serbs and Croats (Sontag, 2004).

After a while, the history of war and suffering gains importance in terms of how violence is shown, and historical reality, especially today, leaves its place to the reality shown. At this point, the role of war correspondents and civilians in the dissemination of particularly violent images from war zones is questioned from different angles. Should a reporter convey the pain he witnesses to the public as it is, or should he act with the consequences of this sharing in mind? Or where does the boundary of posting violent images begin and end? Should violence be reported as it is or filtered?

A more important issue is whether news consumers who watch violent images have thoughts that are appropriate to the purposes that those who produce the news want to achieve. In this context, it is important how viewers interpret this message when exposed to pornographic violent images.

In this study, it was tried to determine how violent images spread on a largely uncontrolled area social media without any ethical concerns affect the audience and what the audience thinks about these images through reception analysis. In the first part, the concept pornography of violence was explained through a literature review, and in the second section, the results of the study aimed at determining how 13 participants with different demographic characteristics perception violent images that reached a large number of users on social media during the Ukraine-Russia War were included.

## 2. Audience Research and Reception Analysis

Audience research has focused on the effect of messages transmitted by communication tools on the recipient from the past to the present. In this process, the position of the audience has changed over time, and the debates on whether the audience is active or passive have guided the researches. In audience research, where the question "What does the media do to the audience?" has been reflected for a long time, various periods can be mentioned. McQuail (2010), talks about four phases of audience research. These; the period of strong media, which covers the period between 1900 and 1940, is the period in which strong media was tested in the 1960s, the period in which strong media was rediscovered from 1960 onwards, and the period in which media influences from the 1980s to the present day are discussed (McQuail, 2010).

In the 1920s and 1930s, when the audience was considered almost entirely passive, it was believed that the means of communication influenced the audience in one direction. In the ongoing process, the use of the media for propaganda purposes was added to the current situation with the First World War, and the uniform perspective on media effects was strengthened. Despite approaches such as Hypodermic Needle and Strong Impact Model that prevailed in the 1950s, it will be seen that the effect of media tools on the

audience is limited in election research and the perspective of the audience will begin to change (Yavuz, 2005).

By the 1960s, an important threshold will have been crossed in the perspective of the audience. According to this theory, which is called Uses and Gratifications, the audience; it can use the media in a way that the source cannot foresee. This period, in which the audience can make sense of the messages in the communication tools according to their own needs and the audience is active in the production of meaning, has still been included in impact research. In this period, when the answer to the question "What does the audience do with the media?" was sought, an audience-oriented perspective was tried to be developed. Although the process in which the audience produces meaning through media content for their own needs is far from the passive viewer's understanding, the process of meaning-making is incomplete because it ignores the socio-cultural differences and life experiences of the audience. For this reason, the 1970s constituted an important turning point for audience research. Audience studies are rooted in the Cultural Studies Tradition, a branch of the critical approach. (Jensen ve Rosengren, 2005). In practice called reception analysis; the meaning of the message does not depend on the media messages, the cultural and social infrastructure to which the audience belongs directs the meaning-making process. With the reception studies, the media has ceased to be a one-way means of influence and has turned into a channel where special meanings are produced (Yavuz, 2005).

The first reception research within critical approaches has carried out within the Cultural Studies Tradition (Şeker, 2009). In the process Hall's (1999) encoding decoding approach has guided reception studies and has shown that not only television programs but also media content such as books, news texts, and radio broadcasts can be the subject of reception studies (Karaduman ve Aciyan, 2019). Reception studies, according to Jensen and Rosengren (2005) it is positioned among the five basic audience traditions. Among these traditions, which can be listed as Impact Analysis, Uses and Gratifications, literary criticism, Cultural Studies and reception analysis, reception analysis does not claim to establish a rigid social relationship because it developed more recently than other traditions. As Hojier (1990) stated; individual studies do not fully reflect the reception of mass media, but they can give an idea of a particular idea and point of view. This subjective and limited dimension of reception studies constitutes the aspect or richness that distinguishes it from other audience studies. Discovering and explaining the path of individual reception is just as important as making generalizations about social groups (Hojier, 1990).

Reception analysis is the process of establishing a relationship between the meaning produced by media content and the meaning produced by the audience. On the basis of reception analysis there are literary studies based on the concepts of text and reading, the Cultural Studies Tradition with its encoding decoding approach and the Uses and Gratifications approach, which suggests that the audience positions media messages for their own benefit (Şakı Aydın, 2007). The media contents that can be the subject of reception analysis are quite wide; a large number of content such as photographs, movies, advertisements, television programs or news texts can be the subject of reception (Şeker, 2009). The first example of reception analysis; Hall's (1999) based on the encoding decoding approach, the name of Morley's (1980) work is *Nationwide*. This first reception study in the field; it has received criticism in terms of the research environment, the selected groups and the implications of the study. Morley (1992), thereupon, the second important reception study, *Family Television*, was carried out in the participants' homes, in their natural environment. In the recent past, the accelerated reception studies, the differentiation of media tools and contents, and the inclusion of social platforms in the field of communication have become widespread and have different examples of studies (Karaduman ve Aciyan, 2019; Şeker, 2009; Uzun ve Baloğlu, 2018).

### 3. Visibility and Pornography of Violence

Violence has been defined as the deliberate use of physical force or force against oneself, another person or group, which results or is likely to result in injury, death, psychological harm, growth retardation, deprivation (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002). Han (2017) basically divides violence into positive (overproduction, excessive news, excessive information) and negative violence (extroverted, physical). There can be many definitions and types of violence. However, every action or initiative that results in harm is not included in the definition of violence. Because in order for an act to be considered violent, the

"intention to harm" must be involved in the process. Violence; outward violence is basically divided into three types as self-directed, interpersonal and collective violence. In this study, a discussion will be developed on physical violence, which is a subtype of collective violence. Mass violence, also called collective violence, involves the use of instrumental violence against another group or individual to achieve political, economic or social goals by people who identify themselves as members of a group, whether that group has a temporary or more permanent identity (Zwi et al, 2002). Today, especially in war and conflict zones, this situation has multidimensional destructive consequences. The violence experienced in war is more continuous than other types of violence. Therefore, it should be prioritized (Jacobsen, 2022).

The claim that the subject of war and violence is as old as humanity is opposed by Malesevic (2010) and argues that war proceeds with developing technologies. Moreover, he argues that in previous ages, people did not act as organized as they do today, and that war as we know it is a historically new phenomenon (Malesevic, 2010). This approach: wars, land to fight for, crops etc. began to be seen after the acquisitions; it supports Eckhardt (1990) who states that civilization, war and empires grow together. Han (2017), similarly argues that we cannot say that modernity does not enjoy violence. Based on these views, the history of war and violence, which can be argued to go hand in hand with a social "development", has a history of documentation and visualization that can also be identified with social development. Considering the history of the mass media that began with the newspaper, we witness the change in the visibility of violence from the narrative of violence, which was only reported in the print media in previous centuries, to the live broadcast links in war zones today.

Visibility basically gives rise to the relationship between the observer and the observed, and at this point, political ways of seeing and discussions that can open the door to different meanings can come into play. Baudrillard (2002) considers that visibility points to a pornographic process in itself. It also states that computer technologies and communication networks feed this pornographic backdrop. It is known that the reception of deliberately applied violence with the aim of disrupting bodily integrity by the audience is pornographic, and that the pleasure that may exist in the exposure of the body and the act of violence prepares the ground for the pornography of violence (Erdem, 2020). Sontag (2004), who says that it is a separate pleasure to be startled by an image of violence and cruelty, states that it is as shameful as it is shocking to see real pain, which he refers to as the "pleasure of being startled", and therefore those who watch the pain are to some extent "peepers".

Baudrillard (2002) also emphasizes the aspect of the issue of monitoring violence that does not touch the individual, suggesting that the violence watched on the screen is a purely mechanical violence. It is a matter of curiosity whether watching all the nakedness of war from our comfortable living spaces creates a different kind of confidence. The perception of freedom of the internet, especially social media, which keeps individuals out of social boundaries, can reveal the tendencies such as lawlessness, evil and tendency to violence in the inner world of individuals (Çelik, 2018). Different consequences of seeing violence has mentioned. These; that seeing violence will purify the person from violence in his real life, that seeing violence can be a catalyst for aggression, that seeing violence can be an experience to use in real life, or that violence can be learned by watching (Yağbasan & Kurtbaş, 2015).

The visibility of violence that uses the ground of freedom in the mass media is fed by over-communication/over-information, which is a dimension of positive violence that Han (2017) talks about. In a new social structure in which concentration camps do not replace colosseums, where the visibility of executions is gradually decreasing, and where the visibility of violence is suppressed, a new kind of violence is being created through the mass media. Baudrillard (2016) states that today's violence has an effect on things that are essentially changed and hollowed out. For this reason, he states that today's governments are not interested in real violence, do not care about violence, and are able to survive thanks to symbolic violence that they can exert influence on the masses.

If we look at the documents that create visibility into war and violence, one of the first works that comes to mind is; it is Friedrich's book of war photographs at the end of the First World War, which he called "*war against war*". The work is full of war photographs that even the most cold-blooded readers cannot easily look at. The work, which embarked on a social struggle with the war under the compelling

effect of shocking war photographs, was banned in Germany and led to the imprisonment of its author (Martini, 2017). The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), one of the first wars witnessed in the modern sense, was followed by an army of professional photographers. The Vietnam War is also remembered as the first war to be watched by television cameras. Thanks to the mass media, in the 21st century, all the details of death, destruction and violence have begun to be carried to our homes moment by moment. In the recent period, it is known that especially in the Syrian Civil War, terror groups use social media to spread fear and create supporters (Kartal, 2018). Similarly, the claim that the Karabakh War, which pitted Azerbaijan and Armenia against each other, was sparked by manipulations on social media constitutes an unsettling dimension regarding the effects of the media. Wars now appear to have turned into information/disinformation warfare (Gles & Bhat, 2020).

Sontag (2004) states that with the inclusion of real war images in the lives of civilians, war has become an entertainment routine in the television and cinema sector, that real war and the war images produced have begun to replace each other, and that even civilians who have no war experience now have vivid memories in their minds when war is mentioned. In this respect, the media always keeps the memory of violence of civilians alive. This vicious circle of real wars also reaches each other, only killing compensates for the loss of power caused by death (Han, 2017).

Is violence against violence a necessary condition for the continuation of a community (Yağanak, 2020), or are violence and righteousness two concepts that have evolved from each other (Freud, 2018)? Can new imaging technologies change this vicious circle and the course of the war? Or do images of war take violence for granted? Starting from these and similar questions, Evans (2004), in his article in which he adds new dimensions to the visibility debate, asks whether the managers who hide the violence they practice or the reporters who expose all the destruction to prevent violence are more patriotic. Evans (2004), who answered his own question at the end of his essay; it says that the first duty of individuals is to humanity, and that duty can override the laws of any profession.

#### 4. The Ukraine-Russia War and The Pornography of Violence Reflected on Social Media

Looking at the historical background that paved the way for the Ukraine-Russia War, it is seen that Ukrainians and Russians have a problematic relationship despite being of the same race and having many values and cultural backgrounds in common. Especially after Ukraine gained its independence, its desire to develop and maintain its free policies was met with many interventions and reactions from Russia. With the occupation of Crimea, which is a Ukrainian territory, in 2014, the tension between the two countries has reached an extreme level (Sönmez et al., 2015). At the same time, there have been clashes between pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian army in the eastern region of Ukraine (Kurapov et al., 2022). Over time, in this tension, the covert or overt influence of the West, especially the United States, came to the fore, and Ukraine's rapprochement with the European Union ignited the war according to Russia.

Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Thus, Russia launched the most serious military conflict in Central Europe since 1945. By mid-2022, thousands of Russian and Ukrainian soldiers and civilians had been killed or wounded. On the other hand, millions of Ukrainians have been internally displaced or forced to migrate abroad (Kurapov et al., 2022).

Many images from the war zone are being served to the world. With the war, reporters or civilians who broadcast live on their social media profiles became "popular" in the process. Twitter profiles, which are broadcast live from hot conflict zones, have turned into social media phenomena. The reflections of the war on social media are witnessed by different examples by social media platforms and users.

The Ukraine-Russia War, which took place in the period when the shares on social media platforms almost left real life behind, is one of the most interactive wars in the digital world (Göksun, 2022). With the beginning of the war, social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are known to censor pro-war users and pro-Russian or pro-Kremlin accounts. Considering that the European Union has taken similar measures all over the continent, it is an undeniable fact that social networks have also become a kind of war front (Uzunoglu & Karaca, 2022).

During the war, it also witnessed the implementation of many sanctions on the platforms for Meta, the company that owns Facebook and Instagram. The company has said it will allow posts of violence and conflict that would have been removed under normal circumstances, including Putin's possible death and a call for violence against Russian soldiers. So the pornography of violence is supported in a sense. At the same time, the company restricted the access of Russian government pages to the platforms, while Russia responded by shutting down Instagram (Nytimes, 2022). Zelensky then thanked Meta on Twitter:

*"The war is not just a military opposition on Ukrainian soil. It is also a fierce battle in the field of knowledge. I would like to thank Meta and other platforms that help Ukrainians and have an active position standing side by side" (@ZelenskyyUa, 2022).*

In the Ukraine-Russia War, newer platforms such as Telegram or TikTok came to the fore compared to platforms with a high number of users, such as Facebook and Twitter (Engelhaupt, 2022). Loucaides (2022), who defines Telegram as "anti-Facebook", states that the application, which is ad-free, encouraging in the face of autocracy and without a control algorithm, is shaped on the basis of freedom in terms of social platforms. The channels/groups opened on Telegram gradually became the unofficial news agency for the Ukraine-Russia War. Images of soldiers and civilians killed or violently on both sides, captured areas, ammunition losses continue to be shared on Telegram groups without any censorship or verification (Yenisafak.com, 2022).

Images of violence circulating on social media are easily accessible and shareable. The number of followers or members of accounts or groups that share violent images is not to be underestimated. Sharing images of violence, following the person sharing these images or anonymous accounts are important in terms of the visibility of the pornography of violence that the study focuses on. The parties to the war use death, violence and destruction as propaganda materials and strive to win the war at the front with the fear created by these images. Based on this problem, in this study, a reception analysis has been made about how violent images circulating on social media affect users.

## 5. Methodology

Reception analysis ve in-depth interview method was applied in the study. The method, which is part of the tradition of cultural studies, aims to determine the process by which the viewer makes sense of the message. Elements such as production relations and information frames in which the viewer takes part can play a role in the process of making sense (Hall, 1999). This approach has been criticized because it can produce existing ideology in different ways, rather than the viewer discovering new meanings (Fiske, 2002). However, Morley (1993) notes that Hall provides a good theoretical framework for analyzing the reproduction of cultural power in its various forms. For the process of "meaning-making" that is at the center of the approach and criticism, Hall (1999) mentions that, unlike the analytical nature of straight and side meaning, signifiers can turn into multiple connotations. Hall (1999) defines coding and decoding instead of plain and side meanings as processes that do not necessarily overlap and have a certain degree of reciprocity between each other rather than the audience reading the messages however they want (Hall, 1999).

Boyce and Neale (2006), who mentioned certain advantages of the in-depth interview method, suggested that the answers could be more detailed because the participants expressed their feelings and thoughts more comfortably in the in-depth interview than in the questionnaires. The method of adopting the effective audience approach has gained a separate place in social research over time and has been associated with different social issues (Richardson & Corner, 1986; Dupagne & Garisson, 2006; Zainal & Barlas, 2022).

In this study, based on Corner's (2007) indication of the risk of reproduction of dominant meanings, Boyce and Neale's (2006) emphasis on social background, Kvale's (2006) comments about the tendency to one-sidedness in the interview, the participants were not given information about the parties who showed violence and were subjected to violence in order to prevent them from taking a side regarding the images to be watched. Hojier's (1990) in-depth interview warned of the drawbacks of closely linking participants' responses to their socio-demographic characteristics, and the demographic characteristics of the participants were shared, but no rigid correlation was made with the study's findings.

### 5.1. Research Questions

In the study, answers to the following questions were sought:

How do viewers react to the violent images?

What emotional state did the image of violence cause in the audience?

How did the perception of benefit and harm related to the publication of violent image emerge in viewers?

### 5.2. Selection of Participants and Data Collection

In order to provide sample representation, a purposeful sample was adopted and 13 people with different demographic characteristics from the participants aged 18 and over were identified. Based on similar and pioneering studies in the field (Knott et al., 2022; Scammel & Bielsa, 2022) questionnaire was prepared and it was seen that the questions had surface validity in the controls carried out with the researchers operating in the study area. Semi-structured questions were prepared, the interview was deepened when necessary, and the appropriate interview ground was created for the participants to express their feelings and thoughts without guidance. The study was carried out with the permission of the ethics committee numbered 2022/22 of the Faculty of Communication of Selçuk University. Before the study, the participants signed a voluntary consent form and it was stated that they could leave the study whenever they wanted.

The research was conducted in Konya, Turkey with participants ranging in age from 19 to 53. The average age of the participants was 33 years. Considering that the average age of Turkey in 2023 is 33.9 (Tüik, 2023), it can be stated that the average age of the participants has a balanced ratio. 6 of the participants were women and 7 were men. The study was conducted with people with as many different demographics as possible. 5 students, 3 government officials, 2 workers and 3 private sector employees participated in the study.

It is anticipated that the findings of the reception study will be as important as the general studies on social groups. Although the interviews were conducted with a limited number of participants, the cognitive, psychological and cultural findings obtained regarding the in-depth interview processes of the individuals are descriptive (Karaduman & Aciyan, 2019). Each participant was asked 5 predetermined questions. The questions that allow in-depth interviews are open-ended and pave the way for detailed answers to be given in face-to-face interviews (Tekin, 2006). The identities of the participants were hidden and coded as P1, P2, P3 (P: Participant).

Before the in-depth interview, the participants were not informed on which side of the Ukraine-Russia War the perpetrators and victims of violence were in the videos they watched. The background and context information of the images was not shared with the participants, and the participants were asked to interpret only the violent images without having pre-acceptance. In the study, two separate images of violence were shown to the participants. The duration of the first image is 1 minute and 16 seconds. In the image, a group dressed in military camouflage inflicts physical violence on people in civilian clothes (@kucukmoskovali, 2022).

The duration of the second image is 11 seconds. In the video, it is seen that several people in military camouflage shot three people in military camouflage at close range with a gun, with the aim of wounding them (@MusSKilic, 2022). Both images were shared by Twitter and Telegram users in Turkey without any censorship. In the study, Widodo (2022) and Elitaş's (2020) studies, which is a similar study in the field, was used in the process of determining image selections.

### 5.3. Questions Addressed to Participants

-What do you think the images you are watching are about?

-Did the images you watched create any emotions you?

-Did watching these images benefit you? Should these images be in the media?

-What is the most memorable thing in your mind from the images you watched?



## 6. Findings

In this section, the answers to the questions asked after the participants watched the images were shared. The answers to the determined questions are grouped under different headings.

### 6.1. The First Impression the Image Makes

Participants were first asked what they saw in the images they watched. With this question, it was tried to determine how the participants positioned the images when they were exposed to the violent image. 7 participants stated that what they watched in image 1, in which soldiers inflicted violence on civilians, was completely violent, that they saw human torture in both images, and that the images were ugly.

P 2: *It is actually a persecution of a country's citizens. If he is a citizen, then the persecution he has done to his citizen.*

P 8: *How can one do this to a person, no matter what interferes with it, it should not be like this. We've seen how bad a human being can be.*

P 9: *It was clearly about violence. I see people actually killing each other. Or, for example, I saw them persecute their own people because of wars, I saw them plunder.*

P 10: *I see brutality. There is the persecution of people by each other. Even if you are in a war, it is not a pleasant sight, it is completely brutal.*

P 11: *There is total violence. I was very intensely touched. I see religion and country as people, not important. In a word, there is cruelty and violence.*

P 7: *Totally inhumane, must have been brainwashed in war, normally you would arrest a person, there were unnecessary shootings in these images. They must be very stuffed.*

P 12: *I've seen ugly things about the war. It is outrageous that the soldier is head-to-head and violent.*

4 participants stated that there could be an explanation for the violent images in image 1.

P 1: *It's complicated, so we don't know what happened and how. What did it go against, they must have gone against something.*

P 3: *If this is war, it is a tactic of war. It is directed at the people who interfere with my homeland, the soldiers or the other side. I think it's normal. There is violence, but violence is normal under conditions of war.*

P 4: *It sounded like an image trying to establish oppression, kind of totalitarianism. It can also be a natural situation. Upper groups may be given the right to commit violence.*

P 5: *There is a war. It is no longer clear whether the opponents are civilians or what. It could be its own people, or it could be terrorists.*

2 of the participants stated that it would be sufficient to be handcuffed backwards by people in civilian clothes who were subjected to violence in image 1.

P 6: *It's brutal what these people do if they're professionals. In the first one, he beats and hits amateurishly. People who have been subjected to violence may have committed a heinous crime. Even so, reverse clamp is made.*

P 13: *In the first image, there were a lot of violent elements when they should have been put in reverse handcuffs and put in jail.*

One of the participants stated that it would be better to kill the people concerned without inflicting pain on them instead of using violence if necessary, and found the movements of the soldiers very amateurish.

P 6: *If he was thoroughly cheeky and there was war, he could be directly squeezed and killed. There was no need for this violence. These are soldiers, these movements are very amateurish.*

### 6.2. Emotions Created by the Images

When the participants were asked whether the images they watched caused them any emotions, the majority of them stated that the images made them uncomfortable. After 7 of the participants watched the images; stated that they felt feelings of anxiety, discomfort, sadness, pity, confusion, fear and anger.

P 1: *It was better if it wasn't. One worries that the images are not as if they were passed by in one or two shots. It takes quite a while. It's a bad event. Sorrow. People get upset. He can't do anything like his hands are tied.*

P 3: *I'm annoyed. Conscientiously, one is disturbed.*

P 4: *I had a sense of discomfort.*



P 9: *I felt pity. I felt pity and compassion especially for the people who were laid on the ground and struck. I wanted to try to prevent that moment. There were feelings of protecting, of blocking.*

P 10: *It felt bad that violence was shown so much and moved to the upper dimension. Surprise and fear were intertwined.*

P 12: *One feels sad.*

P 13: *I was angry, I thought about how savage humanity is. I was stressed. Sadness seems to be more prevalent.*

One of the participants, for the same question, stated that he did not have any emotions and that he considered the images normal.

P 2: *It didn't actually happen. Our emotions were dulled. I was expecting very different images. I wonder what more could come. I was able to watch it with such composure. We take these images for granted. I can't say zero emotion. You feel sorry for the people who are subjected to violence, but you react to the perpetrators of violence.*

One participant reported experiencing palpitations while viewing the images.

P 6: *I felt palpitations. I already have anxiety, it's frustrating.*

While watching the images, 5 of the participants stated that they felt the need to put themselves in the place of those who were subjected to violence and to empathize .

P 5: *I saw the violence in war. Someone is dying. I didn't feel good. I was both sad as a human being and scared. There are those who have been shot, those who have lost their lives. The shooting of the person there is scary as it makes you think that the same situation could happen here. It can happen to us too.*

P 7: *I thought, what can I do if I were in that situation? I probably wouldn't have been able to intervene. I would probably pray, it's so bad. I know I will not be violent. I put myself directly in the shoes of those who were subjected to violence. I felt anxious.*

P 8: *I felt the fear more. I put myself in the shoes of those who were subjected to violence. I would not want to do or experience such a thing.*

P 11: *I immediately put myself in my place. It could have been me or someone else who was subjected to violence.*

P 7: *I put myself in my shoes and thought about how I could defend myself.*

One of the participants stated that violence should not be shown even if the people who were subjected to violence had done evil.

P 12: *Even if he has done evil, he should not act in this way. He should be handcuffed and put somewhere. With hitting, with violence, this does not happen. I was angry, but I was also angry.*

One of the participants wanted to stop watching the footage. At his request, the screening was discontinued. Participant number 11 made the following statements.

P 11: *I can't watch even if they say that the person who is being subjected to violence has done a great evil. I see the persecution too much because I see it as a human being. I can't stand the sight of blood.*

### 6.3. Perception of Benefit/Harm from Publishing Violent Images

Thirdly, the participants were asked whether watching the violent images subject to the research gave them a benefit, and they were asked to express their opinions about whether there would be any benefit to publishing the images on television or social media. 2 of the participants stated that the publication of the images would be beneficial in terms of the public knowing about the violent events.

P 10: *So I think if this has been taken, social media is actively used, but it should be broadcast on television and shown to the public, the extent of the violence should be made public.*

P 12: *It would be good if these were published. Everyone knows, but it has to be said that these are ugly. This evil also needs to be heard. The whole world should know.*

2 participants stated that it would be better to publish the images censored or carefully.

P 4: *These images should be published under a certain censorship. No one would notice if it wasn't published.*

P 11: *I heard the voices of these people. I force myself to look at it in a positive way. It can be useful in terms of making victims' voices heard. It should be short and concise. Attention should be paid to children.*

One of the participants stated that the publication of these images could be a deterrent in order to prevent acts such as robbery and vandalism.

P 13: *Useful and deterrent for robbery and vandalism. But still not pleasant, not ethical. Criminals should be tried in court.*

5 of the participants said that it was not useful to publish the images for reasons such as the images being scary, affecting children, having psychological drawbacks, normalizing violence.

P 1: *It's not important to us, but it's pretty scary for kids. Fear may occur when he watches the events ahead, he may be afraid at night. Children should not encounter these images. They can be affected, they are very much affected.*

P 9: *Psychologically, people shouldn't be watching. This violence becomes normal as you watch. People are becoming violent. Nor should it be on Twitter.*

P 2: *I don't think it's any use. It hurts because we consider it normal.*

P 8: *I don't think it's any use, the human being doesn't do that anyway. Are they doing it to scare someone?*

P 13: *From the point of view of war, it can do more harm than good. It could provoke both sides further.*

One of the participants stated that watching these images could be useful for the broadcaster to scare the hostile side.

P 3: *It is of no use to us, but it may be for the person who posted it.*

Another participant stated that if he had known the sides in the image, the viewing action could have been more useful and he could have commented accordingly .

P 5: *The images didn't help as they were, but it might have been more useful if I knew the sides in these violent images.*

One participant indicated that it would be useful to watch the footage to be prepared for such confusion.

P 6: *If my country is at war, I and my children must be prepared.*

#### 6.4. Thesections That Make the Most Impact on the Image

Participants were asked if they were uncomfortable watching the images. If they were disturbed, they were asked in which event in the footage the discomfort was more intense. 6 of the participants stated that they were disturbed by the images, especially the moment when people were shot in image 2, the violence inflicted on innocent people, the fact that the images were real and witnessing defenseless people were disturbing.

P 2: *The moment he hit his head with a stone was very uncomfortable, I would have been less disturbed if he had shot himself on the head.*

P 3: *I was bothered by the fact that it was generally violent. It's not a bullet fired by a car or from a distance, it's a one-on-one fight and a fight here, there's violence and there's unprotected people.*

P 4: *The moment of being shot bothered me a lot. It was very disturbing to see people who had been shot lose their body control and get thrown.*

P 5: *Where people were shot. Regardless, the moment of being shot (with a gun) is disturbing.*

P 7: *The use of gratuitous violence against an innocent person is disturbing.*

P 13: *It was terrible to see that it was real, that there was blood.*

One of the participants stated that it would be better if he did not watch the footage at all.

P 1: *It was better if I didn't see it.*

Some of the participants explained why they continued to watch despite being uncomfortable:

P 1: *I watched habitually. I didn't experience any major discomfort, I was uncomfortable, but not so much that I couldn't watch.*

P 2: *I didn't mean to stop it.*

P 4: *Curiosity.*

P 5: *I wasn't bothered enough to stop watching.*

2 of the participants stated that they would not have watched these images if they had encountered them in normal life.

P 6: *If I were on social media, I would pass these images, I wouldn't watch them.*

P 8: *I wouldn't watch it if I was alone.*

The participant, who requested that the images be stopped a few seconds after the start of the screening and did not complete the screening, explained his discomfort as follows.

P 11: *People are brutally hit in the head with the head. That made me feel so bad. My feelings of compassion have been overwhelmed, I don't care if they deserve it or not. I'm angry, tough, but I can't stand it.*

## 7. Results

In this study, reception analysis was carried out to determine how a large number of pornographic violent images circulated on social media platforms during the Ukraine-Russia War were perceived by users. In order to avoid prejudice, the participants were not informed about which side of the war the perpetrators and victims of violence were on, and the context of the violent images was not conveyed. In the study, two images of violence circulating on social media were shown to 13 participants with different demographic characteristics, and the common research questions were directed to the participants, but due to the nature of the study, the participants were allowed to convey the ideas and feelings they wanted to explain or direct.

The fact that the majority of the participants positioned the images they watched under the heading of violence in the first place can be considered as a positive result regarding violence awareness. However, in addition to this emphasis on violence, it is thought-provoking that four participants stated that "there may be an explanation" for the violence in the images. The fact that a considerable part of the participants think that there can be an explanation for violence, and even that it may be more appropriate for people who are subjected to violence to die without suffering if necessary, suggests that they can find a reason for the violent content they are exposed to in social life and that they can legitimize violence even in events where they do not know the context at some.

After watching the images, some of participants reported disturbing feelings about these images. This state of discomfort is a significant data in terms of not normalizing exposure to violence. On the other hand, one participant found both violent images quite ordinary. 5 of the participants empathized with those who were subjected to violence and tried to focus on what they could do in a similar situation. This result can be considered as one of the interesting findings of the study. Among the participant reactions that focused on avoiding violent images; the idea that viewing violent images can include solutions to violence is striking.

Respondents gave very different answers about whether it is beneficial to publish violent images. 5 of the participants; they said that the images were harmful and that children could be affected, so the images should not be published. There were participants who said that it would be appropriate to censor the images, and there were participants who stated that the direct publication of the images could be useful for some deterrence or precautionary processes. One participant related to the benefits of publishing the images; said that he could comment if he knew the parties committing violence and those who were exposed to violence. The final answer shows that violence can be legitimized depending on who is doing it.

The majority of the participants stated that they were uncomfortable watching the violent images. The disturbance in the act of monitoring; it can create a basis for questioning and preventing violence. The majority of respondents has been disturbed that the violence is real and directed at innocent or vulnerable people. This result; it has brought to mind that reactions may change when violence is between parties that are relatively equal to each other, and new studies may be needed at this point. On the other hand, 4 participants stated that they continued to watch the videos out of curiosity, because they did not want to turn it off, or because they were not disturbed. This is important as it emphasizes that the motivation behind watching violent images may be curiosity and that exposure to violent images may not cause discomfort for some users as expected.

## 8. Discussion

Violence is a reality that has been experienced since the first day of humanity's existence. With the advent of mass media, significant strides have been made in the media's attitude towards violence, its reflection and its visibility into violence. The pornography of violence can prepare the ground for content that arouses curiosity in readers and viewers. Although it has a fictional nature, the pornography of violence, which is intensely encountered in cinema, is also included in the news media for different purposes at the expense of ethical rules. While the damage that naked violence causes to human psychology has been revealed in many studies (Krahe et al., 2011; Gentile & Anderson, 2003; Huesmann & Taylor, 2006), there is a debate over the benefit/harm equation in the media and academia, particularly

regarding the publication of images of violence that occur in war and conflict zones (Evans, 2004). In contrast to the pro-ethical views that the publication of violence serves the purpose of the perpetrator of violence, there are also utilitarian approaches that argue that showing violence to people as it is will contribute to being aware of and preventing the persecution.

In this study, it was argued that violent images created negative emotions in most of the participants, drove them to despair and frustration, that the publication of pornographic images of violence would not be beneficial to a large extent, and that if they were published in order to announce injustice, the moment of application of violence and the destruction of the human body should not be given uncensored. The findings of the study in this direction coincide with the findings of Sözkese (2021). In this sense, the results of the study are large; it is understood that the views advocating the "ethical" and "utilitarian" approach are positioned in parallel with their theses. On the other hand, a small number of participants; it has been observed that they are not bothered by violent images, they continue to watch the images with a sense of curiosity, they believe that there may be an explanation for the violence, and they suggest that publishing the images as they are may contain various benefits. In Ergeç and Zateri's (2015) study, it is argued that every violent element causes the normalization of violence. Ergeç and Zateri's work is an important warning about the normalization of violence but nowadays it is sometimes only possible to know violence by sharing images of violence on social media. With the reactions given on social media, governments can produce faster solutions to violent incidents. The publication of violent images on social media like a news agency and their publication on television or other media platforms can have different social consequences (Babacan, 2014). It is seen that the ancient debate about the perception of benefit and harm regarding the publication of violent images is still alive in current research.

In the study, some participants wanted to learn the identity of the perpetrator and the parties exposed to violence. This information was not provided to the participants. Some participants also stated that they would have made more explicit comments if they knew the identity of the parties after watching the footage. These findings allow an assessment to be made that knowing the identities of the parties to violence may change the perspective of violence. In new studies, comparing the results of the reception made by hiding the identity of the parties to the violence and disclosing them later may allow important findings to be obtained.

Although certain ethical rules are applied in traditional media, it is seen that violent images are frequently published. However, it is known that there is more violence image on social media due to the fact that social media has become one of the main news consumption channels, it includes the user in the content production process and uncontrollability prevails. In these tools, it is necessary to take measures to provide an information flow that is based on human psychology, cares about the prevention of violence, and does not highlight the pornography of violence in order to attract more attention while aiming to announce injustice. In this sense, studies that will reveal the effects of violent content published on social media tools, reach large masses and direct international companies to take precautions in this sense will contribute to the field.

**Arařtırmacıların Katkı Oran Beyanı / Contribution of Authors**

Yazarların alıřmadaki katkı oranları Fatma ÖZTAT %51/ Selman Selim AKYÜZ %49 řeklinde dir.  
The authors' contribution rates in the study are Fatma ÖZTAT %51/ Selman Selim AKYÜZ %49 form.

**ıkar atıřması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest**

alıřmada herhangi bir kurum veya kiři ile ıkar atıřması bulunmamaktadır.  
There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person in the study.

**İntihal Politikası Beyanı / Plagiarism Policy**

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Bu alıřmada Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Arařtırma ve Yayın Etięi Yönergesi kapsamında belirtilen kurallara uyulmuřtur.  
In this study, the rules specified within the scope of the Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive were followed.

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