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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY CINEMA ON YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In the 21st century, cinema has become not only a form of entertainment but also a powerful tool of psychological influence on individuals. Gradually, film has become part of everyday life and has begun to affect not only people's tastes but also their emotional state, behavior, and psychology. Media content has a particularly strong impact on young people, who often identify themselves with the characters of popular films and adopt their values, emotional experiences, and lifestyles.

The relevance of this topic lies in the rapid development of the film industry and the growing popularity of psychologically complex films and series such as *Fight Club*, *Euphoria*, *Stranger Things*, and *Nosferatu*. These works not only evoke strong emotions in viewers but also address themes of loneliness, psychological trauma, addiction, fears, and the search for personal identity.

Cinema is one of the most influential forms of art in modern society, as it is capable of affecting a person's emotions, behavior, and worldview. Through storylines and imagery, films help viewers perceive their own lives and the surrounding reality in a different way. Media psychology studies how media influences people's emotional states, consciousness, and communication. In particular, Sigmund Freud believed that cinema could reduce an individual's inner tension and have a significant psychological effect.

One of the main mechanisms of cinematic influence is the viewer's identification with characters. Two scholars described the phenomenon of parasocial interaction as a situation in which a person forms an emotional connection with a character in a film or TV series. Such a connection evokes real emotions: anxiety, fear, empathy, or inspiration. Music, editing, and visual effects also play an important role, creating an immersive atmosphere and strengthening emotional perception.

Society distinguishes several types of parasocial effects: the illusion of presence, emotional involvement, and changes in the perception of oneself and the surrounding world. All of this shows that cinema influences viewers not only on an emotional level but also shapes their values, self-esteem, and behavioral patterns.

This process of identification with on-screen characters becomes a kind of safe training ground for emotional experimentation for a child. When choosing an idol, a teenager does not simply copy an external style but subconsciously «tries on» ways of resolving conflicts, communication strategies, and methods of protecting personal boundaries. Media content becomes a mirror in which a young person seeks answers to painful questions about their own identity and belonging to society.

Cinema often becomes a key tool of emotional self-regulation, helping teenagers process complex feelings that they are not yet able to express in words. On-screen stories allow them to realize that their inner fears and doubts are not unique but part of the shared human experience. This significantly reduces the level of social isolation and helps build an internal value foundation on which they can rely in adulthood.

Let us consider the influence of specific films and series on a young audience:

Fight Club, explores themes of internal crisis, the search for identity, and the negative impact of consumer society on the human psyche. The characters in this film are often perceived by young viewers as behavioral role models, which may lead teenagers to adopt their views or reconsider their own attitudes toward life under the influence of the story.

Euphoria, depicts issues of anxiety, addiction, social pressure faced by teenagers, and loneliness. At the same time, the series may create a risk of romanticizing psychological problems, as its vivid visual style and charismatic characters sometimes form a distorted perception of serious mental states as something normal or even attractive.

Stranger Things, focuses on themes of friendship, overcoming fear, support, and psychological trauma. Through teenage characters, young people learn to understand their own emotions and realize the importance of support from loved ones in difficult moments. This helps viewers believe in their own strength and find ways to cope with life challenges.

Nosferatu, as an example of psychological horror, affects the viewer primarily through an atmosphere of fear and tension. Watching such films allows one to safely experience stress and train emotional resilience to real-life dangers. This provides psychological release, helping a person better control their reactions to anxiety-provoking situations.

Research conducted by scientists at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv showed that after watching a film, a teenager's anxiety level may slightly increase; however, at the same time, energy levels, emotional uplift, and self-confidence also rise. This demonstrates that cinema has a complex psychological impact: it not only evokes strong emotional responses but can also help individuals become more aware of their own emotions, find motivation, and discover internal resources for overcoming difficulties.

Cinematography often becomes a means of emotionally experiencing situations that a person cannot go through in real life. Through empathy with characters, viewers learn to understand other people's feelings, analyze characters' behavior, and rethink their own life situations. Its influence is especially strong on teenagers, as they are more emotionally vulnerable and more inclined to imitate media models during this stage of development.

The positive effects of cinema include:

1. the development of empathy and the ability to understand others' experiences through the effect of para-empathy;
2. modeling character strengths and forming one's own life position;
3. providing psychological support through recognition of similar experiences, which reduces feelings of loneliness; film therapy is actively used as a psychotherapeutic method to support mental health and personal development;
4. the development of media literacy and critical thinking through conscious analysis of viewed content.

The negative effects include:

5. the romanticization of depression, addiction, or violence, which forms distorted perceptions of normality among young people. Research shows that exposure to violent behavior in media may lead to imitation, especially among children and adolescents;
6. the formation of unrealistic expectations about oneself and the surrounding world under the influence of idealized media images; media addiction leads to difficulties in building realistic life plans for young people;

7. emotional dependence on content: according to a 2026 study, Ukrainian youth aged 14 to 23 spend between 6 and 16 hours a day in front of screens;
8. the use of background content as an emotional buffer - to avoid «being left alone with one`s thoughts» and to escape anxiety and difficult emotions.

Thus, modern cinema serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a powerful tool for personal transformation that directly influences the viewer`s emotional state and value system. Young audiences are the most strongly affected, as during the process of identity formation, teenagers subconsciously adopt behavioral patterns and worldviews from on-screen characters. Through deep immersion and emotional attachment to characters, cinema becomes an important institution of socialization and adaptation.

On one hand, high-quality content helps develop emotional intelligence, teaches empathy, and encourages self-improvement. On the other hand, there is a risk of copying harmful behaviors or idealizing psychological problems if the content is consumed without proper analysis. To ensure that cinema remains a beneficial developmental resource, young people need to develop critical thinking and approach what they watch responsibly.

Therefore, a balance between emotional engagement and rational perception is the key to the positive influence of media on the human psyche.

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