

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The adolescent years are often referred to as a critical stage of human development. According to Pfeifer and Berkman (2018), adolescence is a crucial period for developing identity, personal commitment, goals, motivation, and psychosocial well-being. At this stage, adolescents commonly become more self-conscious about their appearance and may feel as if they are constantly being judged by their peers. These developmental processes are increasingly happening in the online world, where adolescents are exposed to evaluation, comparison, and feedback.

Digital culture has a huge impact on the way teenagers shape their identities and evaluate themselves. As Nesi et al. (2018) note, social media contexts increase the visibility of peer behavior and expand opportunities for peer feedback through features such as likes, comments, and follower counts. Vannucci et al. (2020) indicate that visible online feedback can shape how behaviors are interpreted and reinforced. Online platforms also become spaces for personal expression, identity exploration, and social validation, where adolescents may seek recognition, visibility, and acceptance (Gutiérrez-Martín & Ordóñez-Olmedo, 2026). Pérez-Torres (2024) further explains that digital spaces allow adolescents to interact, present themselves, and receive feedback from online audiences, which contributes to self-concept validation and identity development. Therefore, online validation in

this study refers to recognition, attention, approval, and acceptance received through online feedback and audience responses.

In addition to online validation, peer relationships also play a significant role during adolescence. As teenagers begin to separate more from their parents, they tend to place greater importance on friendships while searching for their own identity (Tsagem, 2022). As a result, peer influence intensifies since adolescents tend to look for validation, acceptance, and advice from their friends. Liu et al. (2022) stated that many adolescents are strongly influenced by their peers because they value their opinions and approval, which can also create social pressure. Peer norms and expectations can influence behavioral changes, especially when adolescents seek to fit in or avoid social rejection.

The American TV series *Euphoria* (2019) portrays the influence of online validation and peer relationships on adolescent behavior. Through the character of Kat Hernandez, the series illustrates how attention, recognition, and responses from online audiences may affect the way adolescents perceive themselves and behave. This study focuses on analyzing Kat's behavior change in *Euphoria* Season I through Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. By examining Kat's experiences, this study aims to identify the behavioral changes portrayed in relation to online validation and peer influence during adolescence. The analysis emphasizes the ways in which Kat's transformation is reflected in changes in self-expression, self-presentation, and her responses to the people and environments surrounding her.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the topic and background of the study, these are the questions to analyze the study:

1. How are intrinsic elements used to portray Kat's character and behavior in *Euphoria* (2019)?
2. How does Kat's behavior change due to online validation in *Euphoria* (2019)?
3. How does Kat's behavior change due to peer influence in *Euphoria* (2019)?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is:

1. To analyze how intrinsic elements are used to portray Kat's character and behavior in *Euphoria* (2019).
2. To analyze how Kat's behavior changes due to online validation in *Euphoria* (2019).
3. To analyze how Kat's behavior changes due to peer influence in *Euphoria* (2019).

1.4 Scope of the Study

The study is based on the character Kat from the TV series *Euphoria* (2019) created and written by Sam Levinson. The research is based on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) as the main theoretical framework to analyze Kat's behavior change. The theory is relevant because it helps to understand how behavior can be learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement in a social context.

The research is limited to Kat's character as presented in *Euphoria* Season I, focusing on events and situations in the series that show a change in her behavior. The study aims to understand how online validation and peer influence impact Kat's behavior change, by analyzing Kat's behavior and changes in it.

1.5 Previous Studies

Some of the previous studies have analyzed the HBO series *Euphoria* (2019) from different perspectives. The first research is "*Beyond the 'Trans Fact'? Trans Representation in the Teen Series Euphoria: Complexity, Recognition, and Comfort*" by Masanet, Ventura, and Ballesté (2022). This paper examines the portrayal of the Jules Vaughn character in the series as a transsexual. The researchers claim that *Euphoria* transcends the typical stereotype of trans characters in their close reading analysis. Jules is represented as complicated and multidimensional, rather than the "trans fact" story. The study concludes that the series offers a more inclusive and humanized portrayal of trans identity.

The second study is "*The Contemporary Aesthetics of Adolescence: How Euphoria Uses Style to Spectacularize Representation of Modern Youth in the Articulation of a Teenage Gaze*" by Coles (2023). This paper examines the visual style and aesthetic decisions of *Euphoria* and its representation of contemporary adolescence. The research suggests that the series employs lighting, costume and cinematography to create a "teenage gaze" that reflects contemporary teenage culture and feelings. The visual aesthetics in this study is important as a contribution to the representation of the image of teenagers as a vulnerable group.

The third study is “*The Personality Structure and Defense Mechanism of the Main Character in the Series Euphoria (2019)*” by Rulita (2023). This study is based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory and looks at the personality structure and defense mechanisms of Rue Bennett. The results reveal that Rue's id prevails over her ego and superego, leading to her drug addiction and emotional imbalance. Coping mechanisms about her trauma and anxiety are also cited, such as defense mechanisms as denial, projection, and fantasy.

The fourth previous study is an article entitled “*An Identity Problem: Judith Butler's Gender Trouble (1990) in HBO's Euphoria (2019)*” by Lizana-Iglesias (2024). The aim of this study is to explore how gender performativity is represented in *Euphoria* by using the concept of performativity from Gender Trouble by Judith Butler. The research centers on characters like Nate Jacobs, Cal Jacobs, and Jules Vaughn to explore the creation of gender identity and its enactment in a heterosexist and male-dominated society. The study reveals that Nate embodies the hegemonic masculinity, whereas Jules is a subversive character who unsettles binary gender norms. This research demonstrates the socially constructed and performed nature of gender as depicted in *Euphoria*.

The fifth previous study is “*The 'Euphoria' Effect: A Popular HBO Show, Gen Z, and Drug Policy Beliefs*” by Gierzynski et al. (2024). This study investigates the effect of the series on viewers' attitudes towards drugs and drug addiction. The study concludes that exposure to *Euphoria* is associated with more compassionate attitudes towards drug users and greater support for the harm-reduction policies using an experimental design survey. The results show that the show influences Gen

Z's attitudes towards addiction and drug policy by connecting with the character Rue Bennett.

The sixth study is “*The Portrayal of Toxic Masculinity on Nate Jacobs in Euphoria (2019)*” by Ayuretno and Kinasih (2024). This research uses Kupers' definition of toxic masculinity to examine Nate Jacobs' character. The research reveals that misogyny, homophobia, greed and violent domination are dominant characteristics of Nate's personality. The logic is that because Nate practices toxic masculinity to prevent himself from becoming like his father, especially his father's secret sexuality. This study highlights the portrayal of toxic masculinity in *Euphoria* through the psychological struggle and the pressure of the patriarchy.

The previous studies indicated that most of the studies on *Euphoria* are related to gender performativity, toxic masculinity, drug addiction, personality structure and trans representation. Yet, there is a lack of research which specifically examines the behavior change in Kat, particularly in terms of online validation and peer influence. Thus, this study will aim to bridge this gap by analyzing Kat's behavior and identity development in the social and digital space shown in *Euphoria*.

1.6 Method of the Study

1.6.1 Data and the Source of Data

The main data for this research is the TV series *Euphoria* Season I (2019), created by Sam Levinson, focusing on the character Kat. The sources of data are dialogues, scenes, and visuals of Kat's experiences, with a focus on online

validation and peer influence. These dialogues and scenes have been chosen as they illustrate the behavioral changes portrayed in Kat, which become the main focus of the study.

1.6.2 Method of Data Collection

The data is gathered through careful viewing of *Euphoria* Season I. The researcher observed the episodes, notes the significant scenes and dialogues related to the research topic. The data gathered are then classified according to the research questions and the aspects of behavior change portrayed in Kat. In addition, secondary sources are collected through library research to support the theoretical framework and to enhance the analysis.

1.6.3 Method of Approach

This study employs both intrinsic and extrinsic approaches. The intrinsic approach is used to analyze the internal elements of the series, namely characterization, setting, conflict, and cinematography based on the theories proposed by Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith (2020). These elements are examined to understand how Kat's character and behavior are portrayed throughout the narrative. The extrinsic approach applies Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory to analyze Kat's behavior change in relation to online validation and peer influence. Although Social Learning Theory was originally developed to explain human behavior in real-life social contexts, the theory can also be used in literary and film studies to analyze how behavior is represented through fictional characters. In this study, the theory is not used to examine a real individual, but to understand how *Euphoria* portrays Kat's behavior change in relation to online validation and peer

influence. Through the concepts of observation, reinforcement, and motivation, Social Learning Theory provides a framework for analyzing the ways Kat's behavior is represented and developed throughout the narrative.

1.7 Organization of the Writing

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, scope of the study, previous studies, method of the study, and organization of the writing.

CHAPTER II: INTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This chapter discusses the intrinsic theoretical frameworks used in the study. The chapter focuses on characterization, setting, and conflict as the main elements used to analyze how Kat's character and behavior in *Euphoria* Season I.

CHAPTER III: EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This chapter presents the extrinsic theoretical frameworks used in the study. The chapter discusses Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura as the main theory, and adolescent behavior and identity formation, online validation, and peer influence as supporting concepts to analyze Kat's behavioral changes in *Euphoria* Season I.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

This chapter contains the study's analysis. It discusses how the intrinsic elements portray Kat's character and behavior and analyzes her behavioral changes in relation to online validation and peer influence by applying the intrinsic and extrinsic theoretical frameworks.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the conclusion of the study. It summarizes the main findings and explains the broader significance of Kat's behavioral changes in *Euphoria* Season I.

REFERENCES

