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Can its popularity last?

WHY DOES EVERYONE LOVE EUPHORIA?

"I'll live forever." Over a moody track, this lyric is repeated, the syllables loosened, blending with other vocalizations. It's a perfect reflection of adolescence: a feeling of eternity that's uncertain and blurred at the edges. *Forever*, composed by English musician Labrinth, is the first song I think of when I think of *Euphoria*, the hit TV series that aired on HBO in the summer of 2019 and subsequently took the reins of the pop culture world. It totaled a linear audience of 560,000 viewers, and had an overall average of 5.6M viewers, including streams and replays (Porter). *Euphoria*'s association with A24, its meaningful subversion of convention and its specialized marketing strategy solidified the show's status as a hit, which will remain strong due to its influence on pop culture.

Part of A24's World

In the book *Hit Makers*, journalist Derek Thompson suggests that things become pop culture hits because audiences are repeatedly exposed to them, which generates familiarity, in turn creating fluency (Thompson 66). To a certain extent, people gravitate towards consistency. As for *Euphoria*'s success, this fluency can be credited to its production company, A24. Over the past four years, this company has produced independent films which have soared far above the rest in success and influence. *Hereditary* and *Midsommar* changed the horror genre. *Eighth Grade* redefined the coming-of-age. *Moonlight* won several Academy Awards. With A24, it's not a predictable filmmaking style that creates fluency, it's the consistent quality and originality of each piece of media (Rao). Knowing that A24 is attached to *Euphoria* immediately gives the series value and appeal, setting a positive expectation which is exceeded.

One for the Teens

Teen dramas are by no means hard to come by. The genre is saturated with countless takes on teenagers navigating school, relationships and society as a whole. I've also come to expect a level of shock value to be incorporated into each series. *Euphoria* has followed that pattern, heightening the controversial content to an extreme. The pilot alone is rife with it: statutory rape, non-consensual choking during sex, revenge sex, and of course, drug addiction. *Hit Makers* states that "the most significant neophilic group in the consumer economy is probably teenagers" (Thompson 102). As they question their stake in society, teenagers seek that which challenges cultural conventions -- the shock value of this transgressive content aligns with that, making it easy to see why *Euphoria* was so successful among its target demographic.

Finding Meaning in the Neon

However, novelty alone cannot lead to sustained success. Although *Euphoria*'s depiction of teen life reaches a hedonistic high, as TV critic Boyd Hilton says, "Even in the current wave of edgy teen dramas... Euphoria outdoes them all" (Hayes), it isn't done frivolously, or solely for shock value. The series is not realistic in the least -- the average teenager does not dress like, do their makeup like, or act exactly like a *Euphoria* character. However, creator Sam


Levinson is fully aware of this, playing into the artifice of the TV medium and heightening the circumstances and visuals on purpose (Seitz). This enables the audience to move past the awareness that they are consuming a constructed piece of media and access the deeper meaning that the show creates; the meaning that *matters* because it's what people relate to. VICE interviewed several young adults about the series, and many said that the show felt authentic to the modern teenage experience, generalizing specific examples from the show to fit their life experience (Paige). This connection is the reason why *Euphoria* and other teen series become popular; as teenagers construct their own identity, the media that caters to them and that they relate to can become a part of that identity because that connection feels so profound (García-Muñoz & Fedele).

Feel Something... Online

HBO shifted their marketing strategy when it came to *Euphoria*, their first teen-oriented show. Emily Giannusa, VP of digital marketing at HBO says, "When you reach out to this younger fanbase, it can't feel like marketing -- it has to feel real." (Schiff).

On Twitter, they use a tone that feels friendly and personal, with no capitalization or punctuation and decidedly of-the-time slang -- to Gen Z, it feels like you're hearing from a peer. On Instagram, they shared behind-the-scenes photos, edits of scenes from the show and portraits of the cast. The accounts aren't trying to sell you the show, it assumes you are already watching.
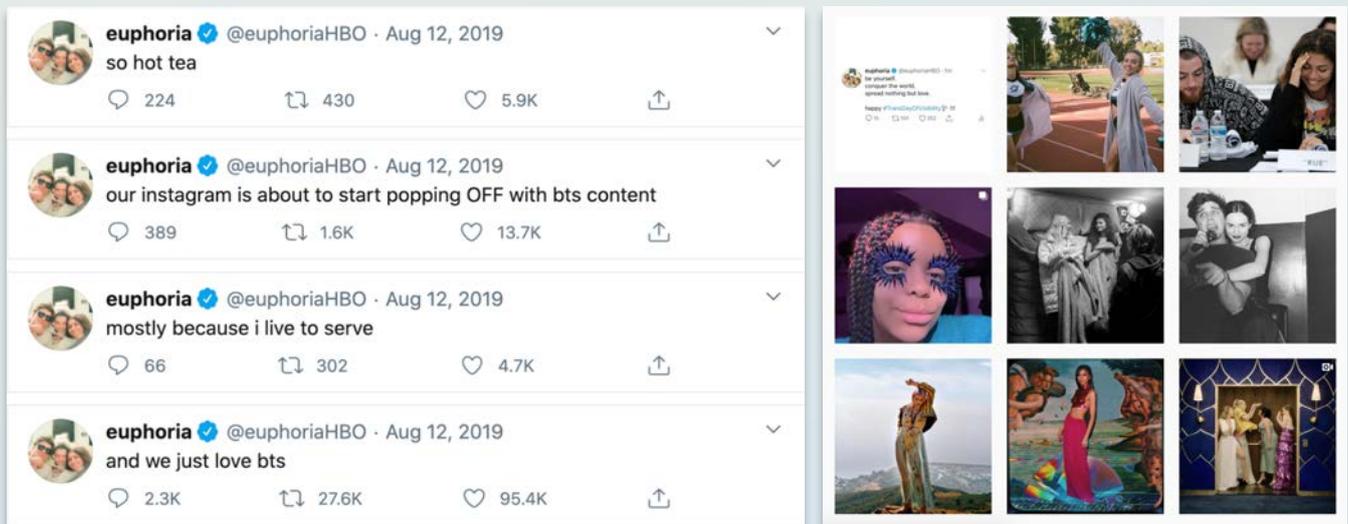

The marketing team also adopted an "always-on" presence on Twitter (@euphoriaHBO) and Instagram (@euphoria) in order to "inspire FOMO ['fear of missing out'} and catch-up" (Schiff). This consistent presence feeds into the current dependence on social media, encouraging more interaction with content related to the series. When these interactions are fostered, more people want to have a stake in it. *Hit Makers* states, "What they're buying is not just a product, but also a piece of popularity itself" (Thompson 302). This is especially true for TV, as people often gravitate towards what the majority says is good. The fan community that has been created across social media platforms, aided by *Euphoria*'s marketing, has the potential to keep the show a mainstay in the cultural consciousness.
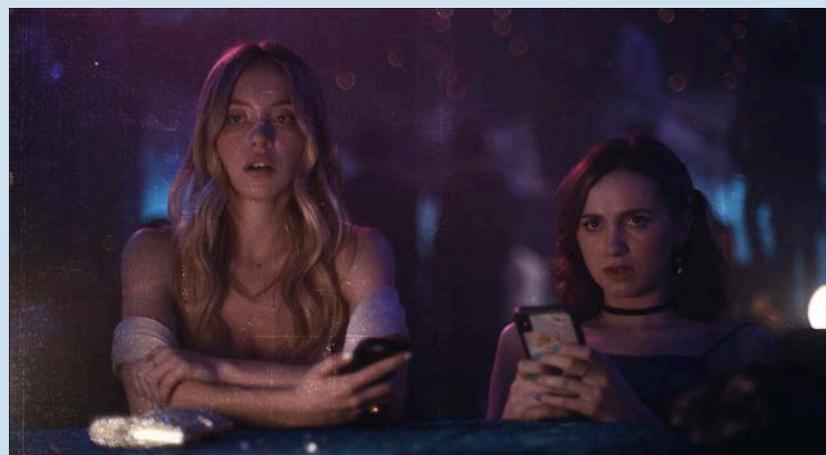
Ripples Through Culture

Euphoria is going to stay a pop culture hit because it didn't simply reflect the modern teenage condition -- it influenced it. Sure, people watched it and were able to relate to it to a certain extent, but people were also inspired by it, wanting to make the show a part of themselves. Through makeup and fashion, this is achievable.

Before Euphoria, fashion trends included wearing biker shorts, tennis skirts, harnesses and matching sets, but nobody was pairing clothes together like the characters were (or rather, like costume designer Heidi Bivens was assembling for the characters on the show). It was different and new, but it was feasible for the average teen. People started posting Euphoria-inspired lookbooks on YouTube, giving tips on how to create outfits that matched each character's distinct look. After I finished the show, I remember pairing a blue mesh shirt with a crop top and tennis skirt to emulate Jules -- in a way, looking like her made me feel cool.
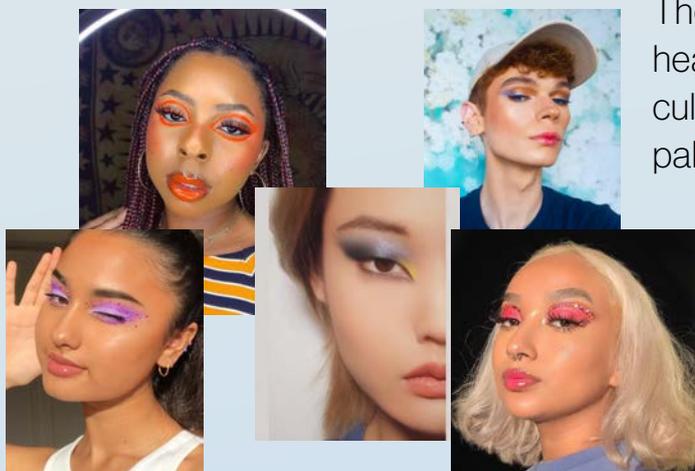
The makeup looks, headed by Doniella Davy, also changed pop culture. I bought my first colorful eyeshadow palette shortly after finishing the first season. The public's engagement with Euphoria makeup was more widespread; people were posting recreations of the show's looks or original looks inspired by the show on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok. Euphoria cemented makeup as a tool of self-expression, making editorial looks seem wearable for day-to-day life. Users are still engaging with the content in a transformative way. Even without embodying it in daily life, more than a year after the premiere, Euphoria Halloween costumes don't feel outdated, an impressive feat in a world where culture moves so quickly. This consistent fan engagement with the existing content leads well into the excitement for Euphoria's future, with two new special episodes in production (the first slated for a December 6 release) and a second season on the way.

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> **[Author Credentials]** Dr. García-Muñoz is a Professor, and Fedele is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising of the Autonomous University of Barcelona.
>
> **[Audience/Type of Information]** This is an academic study about teen TV, aimed at academics and professionals in the field of audiovisual media.
>
> **[Purpose/Bias/Point of View]** The purpose of this paper is to examine the plot structure of a teen TV series at a case study level, focused on Dawson's Creek. The authors are both professors of audiovisual communication, so they may approach this topic more systematically than others would.
>
> **[Currency of the Source]** The paper was published in 2011, but its information can be applied to current media.
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> **[Coverage/Scope/Content]** The scope of this paper is narrow, as it focuses on a specific TV show, however it does provide broader information on the history of teen TV and analysis on the function of this media within its target demographic.
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> **[Relevance to Paper]** Knowing the function that teen TV has for its target demographic can help me explain why it is appealing, applying it to Euphoria can help to explain why it's popular.

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Thompson, Derek. "Hit Makers: How Things Become Popular." Penguin Books, 2017.

> **[Author Credentials]** Thompson is a senior editor at The Atlantic magazine.
>
> **[Audience/Type of Information]** Hit Makers is an educational book targeted towards students and people who are trying to learn about what makes a hit.
>
> **[Purpose/Bias/Point of View]** He writes about economics and media, so his bias lies in favor of them. The purpose of this book is to explore different formulas for making a hit and determining whether something is valuable in society.
>
> **[Currency of the Source]** Hit Makers was published in 2017 and is still current.
>
> **[Coverage/Scope/Content]** This book has a broad scope, but Thompson breaks down the topic and provides a focused analysis.
>
> **[Relevance to Paper]** Hit Makers provides several points on how and why things become popular, which I apply in order to examine the popularity of Euphoria.

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