






Let's talk series: Binge-watching vs. marathon. The duality in the consumption of episodes from the Grounded Theory

Hablemos de series: Binge-watching vs. maratón.

La dualidad en el consumo de episodios desde la Teoría Fundamentada

 Eva Martínez-Serrano. Professor, Department of Marketing, Complutense University of Madrid (Spain) (evamarma@ucm.es) (<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4146-0401>)

 Dr. Diana Gavilan. Professor, Esic University, Department of Marketing, Complutense University of Madrid (Spain) (dgavilan@ucm.es) (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5293-779X>)

 Dr. Gema Martínez-Navarro. Professor, Department of Marketing, Complutense University of Madrid (Spain) (mgmart01@ucm.es) (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9047-8010>)

ABSTRACT

Binge-watching refers to the consecutive viewing of episodes of a fictional series, usually of the drama genre, in a single session. The approaches to its background, practice, and effects are diverse and controversial. Using a qualitative-exploratory approach analysed with Grounded Theory, this paper studies the experience of binge-watching users from data collected from a sample of 20 individuals combined with techniques such as group meetings, in-depth interviews and projective techniques. Results lead to the identification of two underlying patterns of behaviour associated with the consumption of dramatic content: planned binge-watching and unplanned binge-watching. Planned binge-watching is the intentional consumption of more than two consecutive episodes of a fictional series whose psychological effects are mainly gratification based on evasion. Planned series consumption has a socializing effect, especially among young people. Unplanned binge-watching is the unintentional and spontaneous chained viewing of more than two episodes of a fiction series. The viewing unit is each individual episode, linked to the next by the curiosity aroused by the plot. The psychological effects are gratification derived from evasion, followed by a feeling of guilt derived from the loss of control. The study concludes with the formulation of seven hypotheses for empirical verification, academic and professional implications, and future lines of research.

RESUMEN

El «binge-watching» hace referencia al visionado consecutivo de episodios de una serie de ficción, generalmente del género dramático, en una sola sesión. Los enfoques sobre su origen, práctica y efectos son diversos y controvertidos. Mediante un enfoque cualitativo-exploratorio analizado con Teoría Fundamentada, este trabajo estudia la experiencia de los usuarios de «binge-watching» a partir de datos recogidos sobre una muestra de 20 individuos combinando técnicas como la reunión de grupo, la entrevista en profundidad y las técnicas proyectivas. Los resultados conducen a la identificación de dos patrones de comportamiento subyacentes asociados al consumo de contenidos dramáticos: el «binge-watching» planificado y el «binge-watching» no planificado. El «binge-watching» planificado es el consumo intencionado de más de dos episodios consecutivos de una serie de ficción cuyos efectos psicológicos son principalmente la gratificación basada en la evasión. El consumo planificado de series tiene un efecto socializador especialmente entre los jóvenes. El «binge-watching» no planificado es el visionado encadenado, no intencionado y espontáneo, de más de dos episodios de una serie de ficción. La unidad de visionado es cada episodio individual, vinculado al siguiente por la curiosidad que despierta la trama. Los efectos psicológicos son la gratificación derivada de la evasión, seguida de un sentimiento de culpa derivado de la pérdida de control. El estudio concluye con la formulación de siete hipótesis para su verificación empírica, implicaciones académicas y profesionales, y futuras líneas de investigación.

KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE

Binge-watching, series, Netflix, video streaming, Grounded Theory, content consumption.

Binge-watching, series, Netflix, vídeo bajo demanda, Teoría Fundamentada, consumo de contenidos.

1. Introduction

United States. Friday. October 27, 2017: 361,000 people devour “in one sitting”, lasting more than eight hours, the nine episodes of the second season of *Stranger Things* on the very same day of its release (Otterson, 2017), and were joined by another 4.6 million over the weekend according to Nielsen figures. This is the trend that predominates in the current consumption of audiovisual products (Shim & Kim, 2018), to the point of acquiring its own name: binge-watching.

Although there have been precedents for this behavior in the 90s, with DVD, binge-watching appears linked to streaming platforms that, led by Netflix, offer complete seasons of fiction series accessible from multiple devices (television, computer, mobile...), and whose episodes are projected in a chained way: one ends and the next automatically begins in seconds. The episodes last between 50 and 60 minutes and relate to a main plot, usually dramatic (Feeney, 2014), that extends throughout all the episodes, and whose outcome is not revealed until the end of the season (*Homeland*) or even the series final (*Lost*).

Academically, there is no consensus on the term binge-watching. Many definitions focus on the number of episodes viewed in the same session (Sung et al., 2018): more than two consecutive episodes of a fiction series (Walton-Pattison et al., 2018), several episodes (Jenner, 2017), one episode (Merikivi et al., 2018), two (Davis, 2016), three (Ciaramella & Biscuiti, 2014), four (Feeney, 2014), and even the viewing of the entire season in a single day (Ramsay, 2013). Understanding the experience of users during the practice of binge-watching involves unraveling the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral process that this experience implies, identifying three stages: antecedents of consumption, experience during consumption, and post-consumption effects. That is, what happens before, during, and after viewing the episodes.

An interpretive approach has been chosen to address this analysis, due to the experiential nature of the phenomenon from its very beginning to its results. There is a long tradition of interpretive research regarding the experience of consumption (Joy & Sherry, 2003) that argues that the best way to study this experience is within its context, gathering the experiences of its participants and compiling all the possible interpretations before developing the final concepts to demonstrate, with the evidence of the data, the relation between these concepts (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Therefore, we have opted for qualitative-exploratory research through the Grounded Theory (GT) described by Glaser (1992). This theory proposes to avoid the bibliographic review in the initial stage of the research and to carry it out iteratively, in parallel to the collection and interpretation of data, thus minimizing its influence on interpretation. This aspect is relevant when analyzing the binge-watching phenomenon, whose literature is still recent (Walton-Pattison et al., 2018), due to its multiple facets and the absence of a consensual definition of the term (Davis, 2016).

2. Research background: Binge-watching

Binge-watching is linked to the possibility of self-administered viewing, where it is the viewer who decides what to watch and when, without a programming scheme (Chmielewski, 2013). The digitization of audiovisual content and its easy accessibility have fostered this context. It is noted that the term binge-watching is only applied to the audiovisual format of series, explicitly excluding films or other narrative structures within television fiction (Horeck et al., 2018). Binge-watching is related to drama which provides a plot with elements of continuity that hook the viewer, making them link the episodes.

In recent years, different industry tactics, led by Netflix, have favored the practice of binge-watching: releases of complete seasons of the series; ending episodes at a peak moment of the plot, encouraging the viewer's curiosity; automation in the way episodes are replayed (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015); and reduction of the time between episodes to stimulate chaining –initially set by Netflix in 15 seconds, it was reduced to 6 in January 2020 –.

Additionally, events in 2020 also led to an increase in binge-watching. With one-third of the world's population confined to their homes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Netflix registered more than 15 million new subscriptions during the first quarter of 2020 (Mena in Statista, 2021, based on Netflix data), 50% more than in previous periods. In addition to increasing the sources of content, viewers extend the hours of audiovisual consumption and consolidate fiction series as one of the main entertainment alternatives to combat isolation. Binge-watching emerges as a strategy to regulate the emotional states

caused by this unusual situation (Sigre-Leirós et al., 2022). But the influence of COVID-19 should not only be analyzed at the quantitative level. Arrieta et al. (2020) point out two noteworthy aspects concerning how audiovisual products were consumed through streaming platforms during the pandemic. On the one hand, viewing times shifted from the classic prime time (in Spain, from 20.30 to 24.00 hours) to hours unthinkable in other circumstances, such as the morning. The second noteworthy aspect is co-watching. During the pandemic, the use of platforms that allow shared viewing proliferated. Friends and family members found a way to reduce the social distance imposed by the health situation. Some of the main streaming platforms themselves offer the possibility of group and remote viewing, such as Netflix Party, Group Video (Amazon Prime Video), or GroupWatch (Disney+), but they also allow their customers to use other websites and third-party applications.

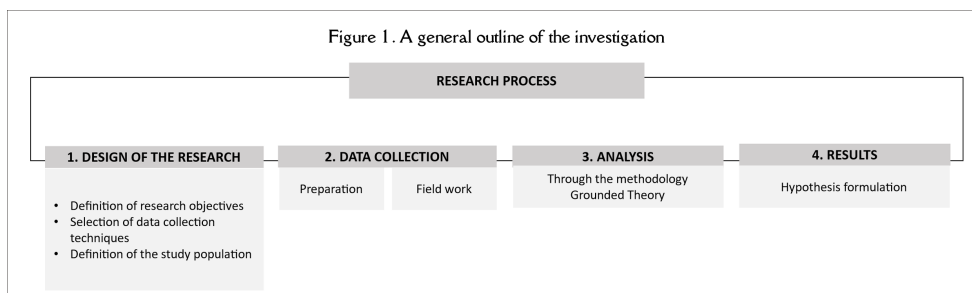
Unlike other similar behaviors that allude to an excess or deviation from the norm (alcohol, food, gambling...) and have a negative social valuation, binge-watching benefits from a positive social consideration. Exceptionally, the excessive consumption of culture, such as music or reading (binge-reading, studied by Hanel, 2014), even outside the norm, distances itself from this animosity to the point of being socially accepted and even admired. Something similar occurs with serial drama, dignified thanks to its complex narrative structures, famous directors and actors, or recognition through awards, to the point of being considered cult content (Jenner, 2017) whose excessive consumption, binge-watching, not only lacks negative social judgment but also unleashes a certain admiration. In this line, the term coined by Peterson and Kern (1996), omnivorous intellectuals, is noteworthy to qualify binge-viewers.

Jenner (2017) proposed the term binge-worthiness, dignifying the marathon for the value of the content of the series, alluding to a non-guilty (Ramsay, 2013) and socially confessable pleasure. Despite this, other studies have pointed out that its negative side cannot be ignored: the binge-viewer can devote excessive time to viewing, which may involve wasted time, poor personal hygiene or eating habits, and even damage their social relationships (Davis, 2016).

It is also noted that terms such as hooking, drug, or loss of control appear frequently linked to the speech of binge-viewers. Several authors have studied the possible relationship between binge-watching and addictive behavior (Flayelle et al., 2017; Riddle et al., 2018). In 2000, the American Psychological Association included behavioral addiction in the DSM-IV-TR (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). Although so far only gambling addiction is included in the DSM-IV-TR, Beck et al. (1999) point out that any behavior can potentially become addictive, which leads to considering binge-watching practiced with a certain intensity as a behavioral addiction.

3. Research methodology

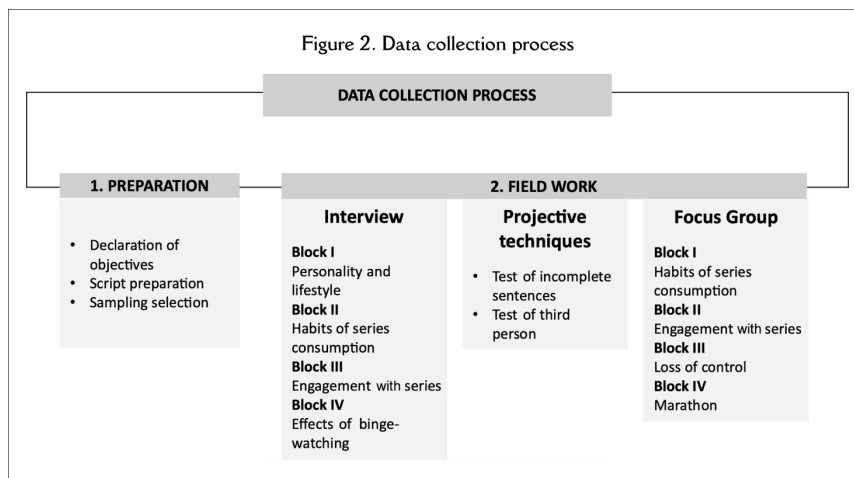
To study the experience of series consumers in the practice of binge-watching, its background, and results, we have opted for a qualitative approach based on the GT methodology proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). GT, considered a research paradigm, leaves room for interpretation and adaptation, allowing the emergence of a research methodology (Birks & Mills, 2015). Our research, following this approach, identifies theoretical categories from the data through a system of codes and sub-codes. Through inductive reasoning, an exploratory qualitative approach to the studied phenomenon is carried out, providing theoretical insight (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). The general scheme of the process is presented in Figure 1.



3.1. Data collection techniques

Considering the exploratory nature of the research, for data collection we opted for the semi-structured personal interview complemented with projective techniques and the focus group, all of which are common in the application of GT. The combination of individual and group interviewing techniques allows us to check the effect of the interaction.

- Interviews: A semi-structured script was followed (funnel type, from general to specific) divided into four blocks: introductory (personality and life habits), series consumption habits, engagement with the series, and identification of the effects of binge-watching. The interviews were completed with two types of projective techniques, ideal for bringing out aspects that are difficult to express directly, like motivations, attitudes, or underlying feelings (Malhotra, 2004): projective techniques of incomplete stimulus, concretely a Test of incomplete sentences (For me the Netflix phenomenon has supposed...; These series for me are...), and projective techniques of expression, concretely a Test of the third person, in order to reduce the effect that the negative social consideration of the addiction could have when talking about their own behavior (... even if you have never done it, do you know any friend or classmate who has stopped going to class because they were watching a series?)
- Focus Group: The focus group script was semi-structured, with a funnel sequence, and divided into four blocks of questions: consumption habits of fiction series, engagement with series, loss of control when interrupting the viewing, and practice of marathons. The summary of the data collection process is shown in Figure 2.



3.2. Sampling

Given the exploratory nature of the research, diversity took precedence over representativeness in the selection of the sample (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). The sampling procedure used was non-probabilistic, combining convenience and snowball. For the selection of participants, only one profile condition was established (age over 16), and two filter conditions: being an online video platform user and having watched a complete season of a fiction series in the last six months. A final sample of 20 subjects was available, 13 were interviewed, and the remaining 7 participated in the focus group.

For the composition of the focus group sample, criteria of homogeneity (age and social class) and heterogeneity (sex, studies, and occupation) recommended for this technique were considered (Malhotra, 2004). The subjects selected have a varied origin. They are residents of Spain (mainland and islands) and outside Spain. Participants were initially contacted in person, and by telephone. Interviews took place face to face, through telephone or virtual meetings. Focus group took place physically. Prior to the interviews, participants filled out an informed consent document. The confidentiality of the data obtained, and the anonymity of the informants were assured. Table 1 provides details of the sample and duration of the interviews and the focus group.

Subject	Age (years)	Occupation	Level of studies	Gender	Interview/Focus group (minutes)
1	16	Student	High school	Female	Interview (59)
2	20	Student	2nd Grade Marketing	Male	Interview (59)
3	22	Student	4th Grade Advertising	Female	Interview (41)
4	22	Student	4th Grade Double Advertising and Protocol Events	Male	Interview (37)
5	25	Student(opponent)	Agricultural Engineer	Female	Interview (47)
6	26	University professor (doctoral program)	Computer Engineer (Ph.D. program)	Male	Interview (42)
7	30	Store manager	Characterization-make-up technician	Female	Interview (27)
8	39	Engineer	Industrial Engineer	Male	Interview (22)
9	47	Marketing Manager	Bachelor of ADE	Male	Interview (30)
10	53	Child professor	Degree in Tourism - Teaching	Female	Interview (32)
11	58	Military	Army Superior School	Male	Interview (28)
12	64	Judge	Graduate in Law	Female	Interview (27)
13	75	Geologist. Retired university professor.	Graduate in Geology	Male	Interview (34)
14	56	Housewife	High school	Female	Focus (52)
15	56	Lawyer	Graduate in Law	Female	Focus (52)
16	56	Housewife	High school	Female	Focus (52)
17	59	Military	Army Superior School	Male	Focus (52)
18	60	Entrepreneur	Graduate in Biology and MBA	Male	Focus (52)
19	60	Entrepreneur	High School	Male	Focus (52)
20	62	Bank manager	Economics Degree	Male	Focus (52)

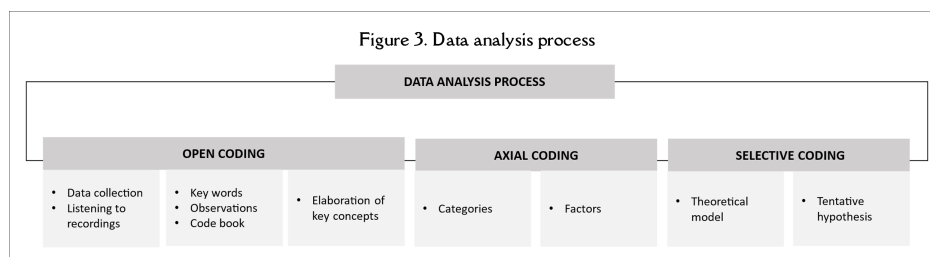
The interviews were conducted between May 21 and June 1, 2021, and the focus group in July 2021. Data collection reached saturation with 20 subjects. In qualitative research, saturation has attained widespread acceptance as a methodological principle (Saunders et al., 2018). Saturation indicates that, based on the data that have been collected, further data collection is unnecessary (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). Qualitative studies can reach saturation at relatively small sample sizes (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021).

3.3. Data analysis

The sessions were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed to facilitate the coding of the information obtained. Data analysis followed a process of (1) open, (2) axial, and (3) selective coding (Borgatti, 2008).

First, the concepts were identified and grouped into categories (open coding). To do this, keywords and all appropriate observations were noted throughout each interview, thereby creating a codebook that was used as the basis for axial coding. This coding activity involves the identification of the underlying concepts and the interrelationships between these concepts according to the type of content with which they are related, which allows their subsequent interpretation (Borgatti, 2008). Codes not semantically related to the rest were excluded.

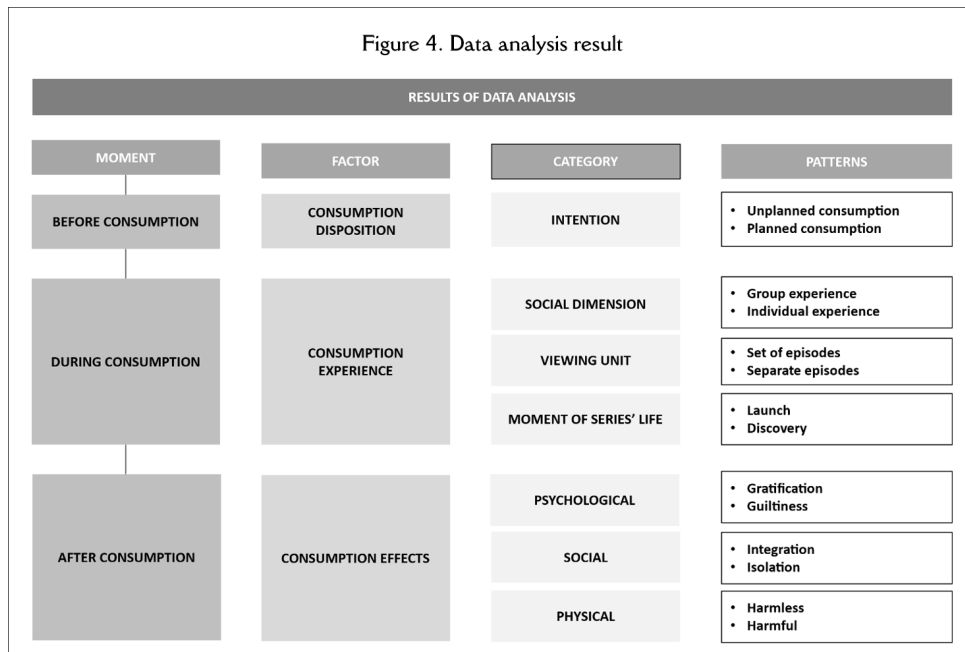
From the data collected, seven categories were identified to unravel and understand the process of viewer experience of binge-watching. At this stage, and depending on the nature of their influence, the categories were grouped around three factors (axial coding). In the last phase of analysis (selective coding), the objective was to provide an overview of the study phenomenon by creating a theoretical concept that would allow the formulation of tentative hypotheses. The coding process is described in Figure 3.



4. Results

When analyzing the codes, seven categories are identified around three factors that are determined by the moment of the users' experiential process during the practice of binge-watching: viewer disposition (before viewing), consumer experience (during viewing), and derived effects (after viewing). The viewer's disposition factor gives rise to the intention category. It is a central factor that triggers the duality of the

process and conditions the second factor, the viewing experience, with three categories –social dimension, viewing unit, and time of life of the series–. Finally, the third factor refers to the effect of binge behavior on its psychological, social, and physical dimensions. In each of the seven categories identified, two patterns of behavior are observed (Figure 4).



4.1. Consumption disposition

Disposition is a factor linked to the moment prior to consumption. It refers to the way in which the viewing experience and the practice of binge-watching are approached. Disposition includes only the category intention, and gives rise to two consumption patterns, planned and spontaneous.

4.1.1. Planned consumption vs. unplanned consumption

- Indicative code (planned): “In summer and holidays, I watch five or six episodes at a time”.
- Indicative code (unplanned): “I don’t like having to wait to watch another episode. If it’s a good series and they cut you off, you say: I’m just going to see how it is solved. And you watch the whole episode. When I watch five or six episodes, I say to myself: but girl!...”.

When the interviewees describe their way of watching the series, two patterns appear. On the one hand, we find interviewees who conceive binge-watching as one more leisure activity within leisure that is planned. It has, therefore, an intentional character, it requires enough free time to watch several episodes in a row and to decide in advance to devote that time to watching the series.

On the contrary, other interviewees state that they set a time for the series, no more than two episodes, about two hours, which is then exceeded due to the interest that the plot unleashes, usually subtracting it from the hours of sleep. Binge-watching, in this case, is not premeditated and could be described as spontaneous.

In the literature on television consumption, not specifically series, the existence of different binge-watching patterns is recognized. Riddle et al. (2018) introduce the intentional and unintentional binomial and relate it to a personality trait: impulsivity. Certain consumers manifest intentionality, previously making the decision to practice binge-watching and dedicating time and/or resources to watching multiple episodes of a television program, while others carry out this behavior spontaneously and unintentionally. These are subjects who consume multiple episodes of the same program without having the objective of doing so in advance. Pittman and Sheehan (2015) also distinguish different types of binge behaviors in relation

to fiction series, planning being one of the determining factors of binge typologies. They differentiate between binge-viewers who “plan the binge”, motivated by the quality of the show and the social aspect, and unplanned binge-viewers, motivated by relaxation, engagement, and hedonism.

Both patterns could be analyzed from the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985). Planned binge-watching is a premeditated behavior encouraged by a favorable subjective norm and an anticipated effect linked to pleasant emotions because of viewing. On the contrary, unplanned binge-watching exemplifies that the correlation between intention and behavior, although substantial, can vary (Ajzen, 2011). Unplanned binge-watching could be associated with a low ability to regulate behavior and inhibit impulses. In terms of affection, there could be an anticipated regret that would act as a brake, but without enough force to avoid the behavior.

4.2. Consumer experience

The moment of viewing gives rise to one factor, the consumption experience. However, this factor groups three categories: the social dimension of the experience, the unit of viewing, and the time in the life of the series. Two distinct consumption patterns emerge from each of these, which are described below.

4.2.1. Social dimension of the experience: shared vs. individual

- Indicative code (shared experience): “On weekends, I watch more than three or four episodes in a row, with my boy”.
- Indicative code (individual experience): “It’s solitary. You manage your time”.

Participants narrate a variety of experiences. Pittman and Sheehan (2015) describe a journey from solo viewing to planning with others. The experiences of the interviewees can be grouped into two modes, depending on whether the viewing takes place alone or accompanied. In the survey by Sung et al. (2018), among those under 30 years of age, 83% usually watch series alone compared to 17% who do it accompanied. In the study by de-Feijter et al. (2016) with German men and women between 18 and 34 years old, 77% of the sample declared that they view series alone.

Some of the practices narrated by the participants show a relationship between the planned binge-watching and the shared experience (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015). Binge-watching planned in company (partner, family, or friends) is linked to fashion series, usually coinciding with the launch of new seasons, as a form of social entertainment. It is an event and requires preparation. The unplanned binge-watching accompanied arises spontaneously from the viewing of series, with family or partners, as an evolution of the traditional family television viewing, after dinner, as a prize (rest for the day). The established consumption dose (one or, at most, two episodes) is exceeded, exceptionally, at points of maximum interest in the series.

Some interviewees declared their preference for solo viewing in a deliberate way as more of a leisure activity, which does not generate guilt feelings. A lonely pleasure, where the phone is turned off to lock up to watch a full season of a show (Riddle et al., 2018). When it comes to fashion series, the young interviewees stay connected with other viewers through social networks so that the viewing takes on the character of an event. Pang (2014) alludes to real-time chat and de-Feijter et al. (2016) suggest that binge-watching has a “solitary social” character. It is practiced alone within a socially active online context.

The interviewees who practice unplanned binge-watching in solitude describe it as an experience that often leads to guilty feelings, possibly related to a greater number of episodes viewed (de-Feijter et al., 2016). Television is the preferred viewing device for company consumption, while the computer, tablet, and mobile phone are the usual devices for solo consumption.

4.2.2. Viewing unit: Set of episodes vs. separate chained episodes

- Indicative code (set of episodes): “When Dragon Ball was released, I couldn’t think of anything else. I watched it all in one afternoon, about seven episodes of twenty minutes. I made a group to watch it”.
- Indicative code (chained individual episodes): “They put the interesting thing at the end, and you say: it can’t be it; they won’t leave me like that. And you put on another episode”.

The data collected suggests that the difference is based on whether they are content units, such as the season, or, on the contrary, individual episodes. When the viewing of a set of episodes is related to the launching of a new season of a series, it acquires the character of an event, such as watching the Super Bowl (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015).

In the viewing of interrelated individual episodes, the content unit is the episode itself, which is hooked to the next one as the curiosity to know how the plot unfolds cannot be mastered. The succession of episodes could even go up to the entire season. Interviewees coincide in feeling “hooked by the dramas”, as the narrative presents elements of continuity (de-Feijter et al., 2016). Drama versus comedy, and suspense within the drama, encourage longer viewing time. Regarding the content development strategy, the episodes can have a closed or open ending, the latter being the one that most favors the chaining, especially when the situations of maximum tension within the plot (cliff-hanger) are placed at the end of the episode.

4.2.3. Moment in the life of the series: Launch vs. discovery

- Indicative code (launch): “I want it now. Before anyone. Before you get all the spoilers”.
- Indicative code (discovery): “I feel like I’m trapped by some series when one episode ends, and I want to watch the next one”.

The motivation of the binge-watching planned before the premiere of a new season of a fashion series among young people has a social nature, of attachment to the group. The same fondness for following fashions is not observed among those interviewed over 40 years of age, nor for being the first in their circles to watch a new series or season. This planned binge-watching prompted by the launch of a new season of a series has been widely picked up by the literature. According to Wallenstein (cited by Matrix, 2014), the fifteen episodes of the new season of *Arrested Development*, released by Netflix in the summer of 2013, were watched by 10% of viewers in the next 24 hours.

The motivation for unplanned binge-watching is linked to the discovery of a series, with an enveloping plot, which prompts the viewer to link one episode to another. This behavior could be facilitated by the way binge-viewers select the series: they choose them carefully; they are prescribers, and they recommend them. They are very demanding and abandon those series they do not like. There are abundant references to the discovery effect and the consequent chained viewing of episodes. Flayelle et al. (2017) argue that immersion (engagement) is linked to plots that extend throughout the entire season, the attractiveness of a beginning, and the personality of the protagonists, with whom binge-viewers can develop strong ties.

4.3. Effects of experience

One factor emerges after viewing: the effects of consumption. These effects can be grouped according to their psychological, social, or physical nature. The psychological effects are gratification derived from evasion, followed by a feeling of guilt derived from the loss of control and reinforced by sedentarism and procrastination. Each of these three categories gives rise to the patterns of consumption described below.

4.3.1. Psychological effects: Gratification vs. guilt

- Indicative code (gratification): “You evade other worlds”.
- Indicative code (guilt): “[...] you lose control. It is comparable to a drug; you cannot stop using it. You want to quit, but you can’t”. It seems that the feeling of guilt is less when the experience is shared.

The interviewees watch the series as a form of immersive entertainment. They declare to “go” fully into the story, establishing an intense connection with these series. They talk about the series, think about them at other times of the day, recommend them, identify with the characters, buy merchandising items, and even create content, usually drawings. Season endings trigger feelings of desolation and emptiness among the youngest. These effects have been studied since the Theory of Uses and Rewards (Katz et al., 1973). Pittman and Sheehan (2015) refer to experiences that distance binge-viewers from everyday life and their obligations through hedonism, avoidance, and immersion. Jones et al. (2018) even allude to escapism. This gratification is reflected in any manifestation of binge-watching.

However, in unplanned binge-watching, guilt emerges in the speech of some interviewees. Pittman and Steiner (2019) have called it post-binge regret and relate its intensity to the attention the series arouses, which depends on the degree of narrative transportation and the need to complete the narrative. The greater the attention, the less regret. The phrase “control is lost” emerges when interviewees refer to the chained viewing of episodes. From the lack of control springs, the feeling of guilt. Vice, hooking, addiction, or drug describe the experience, words that do not appear in the case of planned binge-watching.

In planned binge-watching, interviewees may also experience guilt for the perception of the behavior as unhealthy, sedentary, “confined” or “hermit”, or due to the opportunity cost of time (de-Feijter et al., 2016).

Despite this, self-indulgence (Sung et al., 2018) acts as a reducer of guilt. Firstly, because of the absence of negative social valuation of binge-watching since the series is considered quality content. And secondly, by the normalization of behavior: everyone does it, therefore it is not harmful.

For all the above, planned binge-watching occurs as blameless gratification, while unplanned binge-watching leads to a duality of guilty gratification. This conflict is described by Shim et al. (2018), concluding that binge-viewers simultaneously experience negative and positive feelings, the latter reinforcing and facilitating the behavior.

4.3.2. Social: Integration vs. isolation

- Indicative code (integration): “If in a group of three, two people are watching the series, you’ll be left out”.
- Indicative code (isolation): “Maybe I’m going to hang out with a friend, but I tell them I’m sick and watch the series instead”.

The duality observed in the discourse of the interviewees, socialization vs. isolation, is consistent with the results of Vaterlaus et al. (2019). The authors acknowledge the social character of the behavior (students claim to make new friends with it) but also warn that binge-watching can be socially isolating.

The youngest interviewees stated that they talk about series with their friends, give and receive recommendations, keep up with the latest series, watch episodes online, create WhatsApp groups around series and organize marathons. Recently, young adults are adopting second-screening practices, using another device to virtually connect with their peers while they are watching a series. This is called co-viewing (Nee & Barker, 2020; Pires-de-Sá & Roig, 2016). They consider series to be an essential tool to relate to others. Possibly they seek conformity with the group. Watching and knowing about series enhances their social integration, to the point that they consider Netflix a socialization tool (de-Feijter et al., 2016; Umesh & Bose, 2019). Ramayan et al. (2018) introduce the term binge-bonding, alluding to cohesion between those who practice binge-watching and, on the contrary, to isolation when they cannot participate in conversations because they have not watched a series.

Among young interviewees, binge-watching behavior was linked to an additional motivation: to stay ahead of their peers when watching and finishing series. Horeck et al. (2018) allude to the ritual of ending series and accumulating them as if they were trophies to discuss and give spoilers in various forums afterward. Although the interviewees argue that they practice binge-watching to avoid spoilers, the search for leadership appears as an objective in their speech: being the first to complete the season is an achievement and, on the contrary, being the member who lags could result in feelings of exclusion. Among adult interviewees, this socializing effect is observed with less intensity. Series are usually a topic of conversation, and even recommendation, among family, friends, or co-workers; they help understand jokes and cultural references. To select series, they rely on word of mouth (Pang, 2014).

A recurrent theme in the discourse of young interviewees is social isolation caused by binge-watching. When the immersion in a series is intense, the viewer develops a strong involvement that temporarily paralyzes their everyday life, including its social aspect (de-Feijter et al., 2016). Although most binge behaviors are associated with loneliness and depression, this link is not clear in the case of binge-watching (Sun & Chang, 2021). The existing research is insufficient and contradictory: while some studies have failed to demonstrate a relation between binge-watching and loneliness and depression (Ahmed, 2017; Tukachinsky & Eyal, 2018), others conclude that there is a connection.

These discrepancies may be due to understanding binge-watching as a single behavioral pattern. The differentiation of planned and unplanned binge-watching could explain the contradictions identified in the literature. Following this reasoning, the absence of negative feelings could be associated with planned binge-watching, given its social character. On the contrary, unplanned binge-watching, given its mostly individual character, could be considered both a cause of loneliness and an effect of the state of loneliness, in line with Sun and Chang (2021).

4.3.3. Physical: Harmless vs. harmful

- Indicative code (harmless): “We put the series on after dinner [...]. Sometimes we watch them two by two but sometimes, already addicted, we have watched up to three episodes”.
- Indicative code (harmful): “There are times in which I stayed up until eight in the morning”. Some of the interviewees do not consider the practice of binge-watching to be physically harmful.

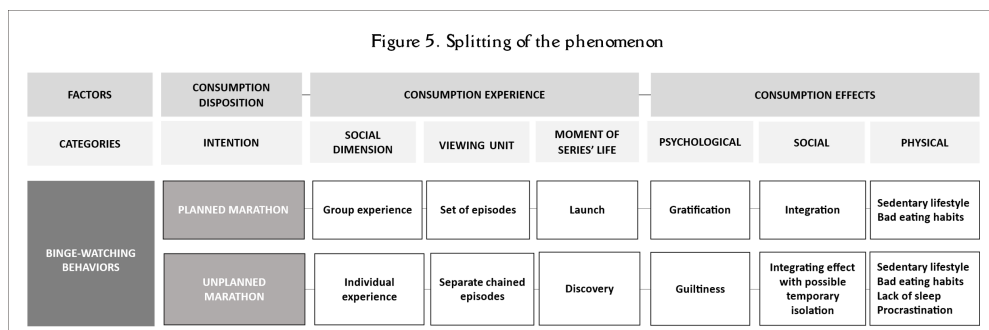
These binge-viewers manage their time and do not abuse the number of episodes watched in a single session, usually two, exceptionally three, in situations of maximum interest in the plot. Binge-watching is one of the ways in which they choose to spend their free time; it is planned and compatible with the rest of their life activities. This practice could even be considered beneficial from a cognitive, emotional, and physical perspective for those facing a health problem (Perks, 2019).

When the watching activity exceeds three episodes, the number of hours dedicated to a sedentary activity can be unhealthy. In addition, binge-watching is associated with the consumption of fast or unhealthy food (popcorn, pizza...), even compulsively: “filling your freezer full of microwavable food” (Riddle et al., 2018: 590).

Another negative physical consequence is lack of sleep, as most of them practice binge-watching at night. Some students interviewed confess that they suffer from sleep deprivation, especially during exam season. Viewers who practice unplanned binge-watching are more exposed to negative physical consequences (Riddle et al., 2018). The literature recognizes procrastination as an effect of binge-watching. Binge-viewers often postpone work and social activities – housework, schoolwork, sports – due to being immersed in the plot until they spend a full day watching a series (de-Feijter et al., 2016). Davis (2016) associates high levels of television consumption with a higher risk of heart disease and mortality from any cause, regardless of other factors such as physical activity, family, health history, age, and duration of sleep. As a conclusion to her work, she describes binge-watching as a harmful behavior and calls for further investigation of its adverse effects.

5. Proposed model

The GT approach suggests the identification of a central category or categories and their relationship with others (Borgatti, 2008). In this analysis, the intentionality of the viewing process is identified as the dominant category. Based on this category, a splitting of the phenomenon is observed both in the experience and in the results obtained by the user (Figure 5).



The proposed model could be expressed in a set of tentative hypotheses susceptible to empirical verification. These hypotheses establish the influence of the categories in any of the three moments of the

process (Figure 5).

Hypothesis referred to consumption disposition:

- H1: Users who watch successive episodes of a series can face this activity in a planned way, although there may also be users who face this activity in an unplanned way.

Hypothesis referred to consumption experience: Users who view series as a planned marathon (vs. those who do an unplanned marathon) tend to:

- H2a: Perform this activity as a social practice (vs. a solitary experience).
- H2b: Visualize a defined set of episodes (vs. an indefinite succession of chained episodes).
- H2c: Watch the series immediately after launch (vs. the moment of discovery).

Hypothesis referred to consumption effect:

- H3a: Experience gratification (vs. guilt) because of this activity.
- H3b: Experience social integration (vs. isolation) because of this activity.
- H3c: Experience, because of this activity, lack of sleep and procrastination.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The definitions of binge-watching collected in the literature focus on the number of episodes of the series viewed consecutively, with few references to other factors (Flayelle et al., 2020; Merikivi et al., 2020). The research conducted in this study identifies two consumption patterns in the practice of consecutive viewing of several episodes. The analysis of the variables identified in the research leads to a splitting of the binge-watching phenomenon (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). Two different manifestations emerge, even with the same number of episodes watched during the same session, based on different motivations, provoke diverse experiences, and result in disparate effects. The intention behind binge-watching is the pivot point of its dual understanding (Riddle et al., 2018). The main academic contribution of this research is the differentiation between planned binge-watching, aligned with the Theory of Planned Action, and unplanned binge-watching.

Planned binge-watching is the intentional consumption of more than two consecutive episodes of a fictional series usually of dramatic content. It has the character of an event and is planned in time like any other leisure activity. It can take place alone or accompanied (real or virtual) and happens through the television screen as the main device. The viewing unit is a set of episodes determined in advance. Often, it is practiced when a new series or entire season is released. The psychological effects of the planned marathon are mainly positive: gratification based on evasion (Jones et al., 2018). However, there are also possible negative effects: a shy feeling of guilt due to the sedentary nature of the activity and the fact that it is usually practiced in connection with unhealthy eating habits, such as fast food.

We have called unplanned binge-watching the unintentional and spontaneous chained viewing of more than two episodes of a fiction series, usually of dramatic content (Spangler, 2016; Rubenking & Bracken, 2018). It is most often a solitary activity due to its unintentional nature. The viewing unit is each individual episode, linked to the next by the curiosity aroused by the plot and the attractiveness of the protagonists, towards whom the binge-viewers develop strong bonds. The psychological effects are dual. Gratification is derived from evasion, after which appears a feeling of guilt derived from the loss of control and reinforced by sedentarism and procrastination. The absence of negative social valuation of binge-watching and the normalization of the behavior emerges as guilt-reducing factors.

Despite the possible temporary isolation of the binge-viewer, the final consequence of the unplanned marathon is integration (Anghelcev et al., 2022). However, the negative physical effects of unplanned marathons are noteworthy. It is sedentary, linked to unhealthy eating habits, and usually practiced at the cost of lost sleep. This work has important academic implications. The proposed typification of binge-watching behaviors brings some order to the understanding of the results of previous research conducted by various authors in relation to the personality traits of the binge-watcher, the application of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the feeling of guilt or even the possible relationship with addictive behavior.

The present work has professional implications due to its topicality. This study explains the consumption patterns of audiovisual products in the current scenario (Song et al., 2022). Business competitiveness in the audiovisual sector has multiplied the abundance and availability of supply, generating

new consumption patterns that need to be described, characterized, and categorized, the latter aspect hardly been addressed by the literature so far. This work has been developed from a qualitative point of view to discover aspects not considered around binge-watching behavior. Due to the subject's social, academic, and professional relevance, further research should be conducted to test the suggested hypothesis.

Authors' Contribution

Idea, E.M.S., D.G., G.M.N.; Literature review (state of the art), E.M.S.; Methodology, D.G., G.M.N.; Data analysis, E.M.S.; Discussion and conclusions, E.M.S., D.G., G.M.N.; Writing (original draft), E.M.S.; Final revisions, D.G., G.M.N.; Project design and sponsorship, D.G., G.M.N.

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