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Binge-watching practices in the pre-pandemic era. Scale of measurement, discourses and related social effects from a case study of university students from Spain

Prácticas de binge-watching en la era prepandémica. Escala de medición, discursos y efectos sociales relacionados a través de un estudio de caso de los estudiantes universitarios en España

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Abstract:

The new modes of television consumption point to the interest of binge-watching as the object of study. This paper builds an intensity index that classifies users into “irregular”, “regular” or “dedicated”. Methodologically, an inter-method sequence is applied, combining descriptive and multivariate statistical analyses, as well as discussion groups from which cleavages or discursive positions derive. The results of the research indicate that most of the University population are binge-watchers so the terms have changed and a new scale is necessary for identifying the level of engagement with binge-watching behaviour in the current. Almost 30% of the university population under study corresponds to the typical-ideal category of “dedicated” and 33% with the “regular”. The growth rate of the phenomenon is exponential between 2016-2019. The triggering motivations for binge-watching are primarily hedonic; its effects affect our moods especially in “dedicated” users. Two different types of viewing are clearly identified. The first is committed or prioritized viewing (with a high attention level, high dependence and sympathy with regards to the story and characters), and secondary or complimentary viewing. The study concludes that, in a pre-pandemic context of over-audiovisual fiction content (fictoxication), the ability to select and self-assess the media diet acquires the fundamental skill status in the socio-educational framework of the younger ones.

Keywords: Binge-watching, multiplatform, Netflix, inter-method triangulation, TV, streaming.

Resumen:

Los nuevos modos de consumo televisivo apuntan al interés del binge-watching como objeto de estudio. Este trabajo construye un índice de intensidad que clasifica a los usuarios en "irregulares", "regulares" o "dedicados". Metodológicamente, se aplica una secuencia inter-métodos, que combina análisis estadísticos descriptivos y multivariantes, y grupos de discusión de los que derivan las posiciones discursivas. Los

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resultados indican que la mayor parte de la población universitaria practica el binge-watching, lo que evidencia la necesidad de una nueva escala para identificar el nivel de compromiso con dicha práctica. Casi el 30% de la población universitaria se encuentra en la categoría típica-ideal de "dedicado" y el 33% en la de "regular". La tasa de crecimiento del fenómeno es exponencial entre 2016-2019. Las motivaciones son principalmente hedónicas; sus efectos alteran nuestros estados de ánimo, especialmente en los usuarios "dedicados". Pueden diferenciarse claramente dos tipos de visualización: la visualización comprometida (con un alto nivel de atención, alta dependencia y simpatía con respecto a la historia y los personajes), y la visualización secundaria o complementaria. Ambos tipos de visualización son hábitos maratonianos, y normalmente se complementan entre sí. El estudio concluye que, en un contexto pre-pandémico de sobreoferta de contenidos de ficción (fictoxicación), la capacidad de seleccionar y autoevaluar la dieta mediática se convierte en destreza fundamental en el marco socioeducativo de los más jóvenes.

Palabras clave: Binge-watching, multiplataforma, Netflix, triangulación inter-métodos, TV; streaming.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF *BINGE-WATCHING* AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Changes in how we consume audio-visual content, along with how this content is provided, have reinvented the traditional system, the one-way system of communication and the spectator's role (Neira, Clares-Gavilán & Sánchez-Navarro, 2021). These changes have introduced us in the *post-network age* of television (Lotz, 2014; Terfertiller & Sheehan, 2019). New ways of consuming can have a big social impact (Cerezo & Cerezo, 2017; Fernández-Manzano, Neira & Clares-Gavilán, 2016), leading to the individualisation and isolation of viewing habits (Vaterlaus et al., 2019), the simultaneous use of various screens for different purposes (Neira, 2015) as well as changes in the space and time used for leisure (Dalpizol, 2018; Mikos, 2016). Other

spheres change as a result of this complex process. At least two: the communication and the social spheres.

In the younger public, series marathons are more and more common, known as binge-watching (or marathon viewing), which consist in the continuous and uninterrupted consumption of multiple episodes of a same series. Thus, ending the need for the spectator to adapt to the established programme and generating new forms of consumption (Del Campo et al., 2016; Mikos, 2016; Kabusheva et al., 2016; Jenner, 2017; Walton-Pattison, Dombrowski & Presseau, 2018; Sung, Kang & Lee, 2018).

Like all recent phenomena, researchers try to capture, analyse and measure it, but this phenomenon does not stand still. Streaming is a field where the strategies and practices of the parties involved are rapidly evolving and shifting (Spilker & Colbjørnsen, 2020).

For example, one more step in this type of audio-visual consumption would be *binge racers*, those viewers who watch one season of a series in one sitting (Netflix, 2017). And other consequences related emerge as 'fatigue when deciding', because the wide offer makes it difficult to decide what to watch and this could even lead to leave the platform (Neira, 2021). So, this is a work about an evolutionary concept, that changes along viewers behaviour, and have consequences in other aspects of living. Due to this, we offer a reference study just in the context immediately prior to the emergence of the pandemic (Costa-Sánchez & López García, 2020). The present measurement and modelling of users may serve comparatively for later studies.

1.2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Previous research suggest that binge-watching has become common with 31% of viewers binge-watching at least once a week and 61% of viewers who stream television reporting binge-watching regularly (Grimshaw, Blades & Berret, 2020).

Netflix appears as the pioneering platform for this practice, due to its viewing model based on the supply of complete series and an effective prescriptive system with content subject to subscription, which maintains the endless consumption from large catalogue for a demand that is never satisfied (Izquierdo-Castillo, 2015; Jenner, 2018;

Schweidel & Moe, 2016). In the streaming market, different content strategies depending on the actor emerge, for instance, Netflix and HBO (Martín-Quevedo, Fernández-Gómez & Segado-Boj, 2019).

The study of *binge-watching* is recent and has been approached from different perspectives including health (Walton-Pattison et al., 2018), cultural studies (Jenner, 2017) or from communication science, especially through the prism of the uses and gratifications theory (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015; Panda & Pandey, 2017; Steiner & Xu, 2018; Tefertiller & Sheehan, 2019). One of the first obstacles encountered by researchers is establishing what is considered to be marathon viewing (Merikivi et al., 2019). In the research carried out by Walton-Pattinson, Dombrowski and Presseau (2018), the concept is defined as the viewing of more than two episodes of the same series one after the other; however, they indicate that there is a need for a binging scale. Deloitte (2015) has found that on average 70% of North American consumers binge-watch, which he defines as the consumption of three or more episodes of the same series in one sitting. The percentage went as high as 80% for the millennial generation, with a sharp decrease in the baby-boom generation. Some authors consider the number of hours of consumption, where a minimum of 2-4 hours would be considered a marathon (Petersen, 2016). In one of the few studies carried out in Spain (Hernández & Martínez, 2016), some 78% of the sample consumed two episodes of the same series one after the other, while 18% increase their consumption to three.

The common denominators for this new phenomenon for consuming TV are as follows: 1) it concerns fictional series formats, and therefore it goes hand in hand with series being the new leaders with regards to audio-visual production (Cascajosa, 2015); 2) there is also a technological element, which has broken the traditional television broadcast system; 3) it consists in consuming a minimum of two episodes one after the other, at least once a week; 4) this practice is associated with young consumers and in particular millennials and Z generation (Martín-Quevedo, Fernández-Gómez & Segado-Boj, 2021); 5) it is a widely used practice (Rubenking & Campanella, 2018; Rubenking et al., 2018); 6) there is a level of disagreement with regards to interpretation, the associated effects and the perceptions of the consumers themselves.

1.3. BINGE-WATCHING MOTIVATIONS

The primary motives leading to its practice have been identified as: bringing oneself up to date or re-watching before a new season; the entertainment and pleasure of viewing (which implies re-watching to experience this sensation, or to better observe the narrative mechanisms and thus spot possible gaps in new episodes); following recommendations from others or the social inclusion in a group (Steiner & Xu, 2018; Flayelle, Maurage & Billieux, 2017). The rewards are pragmatic or hedonistic (Shim & Kim, 2018). Relax, for boredom relief purposes, or for escapism have been identified as main purposes in Castro et al. (2021). There is a certain level of empowerment for the user, who decides what to watch, choosing based on their primary interests and consuming it when it best suits them. However, feelings of regret have also been detected, for example, the lack of will power when it comes to stopping the automatic playback of the next episode, but also in relation to the time lost in viewing. Terms normally associated with addiction have started to appear (“overdose”, “compulsive”, “abstention”) along with the realisation of having been less productive from a professional standpoint (Steiner & Xu, 2018; Walton-Pattison et al., 2018). Frequent changes in the routine have also been noted as a consequence of binge-watching, such as: postponing showers or baths; skipping meals; delaying bedtime and reducing the hours of sleep; or giving up on any physical exercise (Longwell, 2014; Prinsen, 2017). Study time and sports activities are other habits that have been relegated (Hernández & Martínez, 2016).

Concerning the characteristics of the audio-visual product associated with this practice, the users have highlighted the following (Flayelle et al., 2017): its availability or ease of access (one click) when faced with a great abundance of products, along with factors relating to quality (originality, attractiveness, importance of the story, character development). This positive connotation linked with texts considered to be good quality or having “cult” status has likewise been associated with binge-watching through the fandom phenomenon (Jenner, 2017). Matrix (2014) concludes that the Netflix generation benefits from a hyper-personalised media diet, but is nonetheless socially connected, with all the pleasures of consumption on demand and a culturally

participative citizenship, sustained by new networks, services and technologies. De Keere et al. (2020) explain that binge-watching is being legitimized defusing moral panic through three pathways intensive video-on-demand watching is reframed: first, the shows that are binge-watched are high quality; second, binge-watching can be controlled, at least by the right type of audiences; and third, binge-watching is fun, in that if undertaken in moderation, it can be good for viewers.

The issue is therefore complex. The subject of study continuous evolving and, there is a lack of research and a gap in the scientific literature from social sciences and communication sciences, despite the fact that this phenomenon is increasing.

Two revelatory questions are:

RQ1: How can we measure binge-watching and its evolution at the current?

RQ2: How deep are the changes provoked by binge-watching on time, routines and social habits of users?

This paper tries to answer these questions in a pre-pandemic context, all the while establishing progress and opening new lines for future research.

2. METHODOLOGY

The population used for this study is the student population of the University of A Coruña (UDC), Spain, which had a total of 17,032 students during the academic year 2017-2018. The stratified sample, proportionately fixed with regards to sex and age of the university, includes a total of 625 students ($p=q=0.5$ with a confidence level of 95.5% and an absolute error of 4%). It is worth mentioning that its design is similar to that carried out by other studies on the subject (Rubenking & Campanella 2018; Shim & Kim, 2018). After sample delimitation, a mixed methodology or inter-methodology was then applied (Stoldt, 2013; Rodríguez, 2015; Glebatis, 2014; Panda & Pandey, 2017; Forni & De Grande, 2020) ordered into two phases.

The first phase consisted of two waves of online questionnaires for the students of the UDC, who complied with the basic requirement that they were subscribed to at least

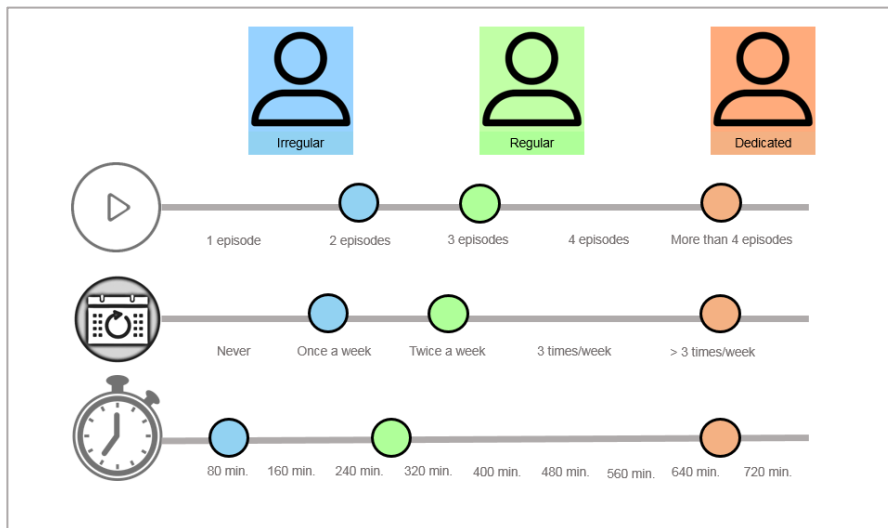
one of the following platforms in the 2018 year: Netflix, HBO or Amazon Prime Video. According to recent data, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video are the two leading platforms in Spain (AIMC, 2021).

Through the questionnaire, information on the sociodemographic profiles of the participants was synthetically collected. Furthermore, different ordinal variables, scaled or open, focused on gathering information on the continuous consumption of audio-visual content (daily, weekly, etc. frequencies) and the perceived gratification or prejudices of this practice on the social relations, leisure time and regular activities of the users, was also collected. It is worth mentioning that we included some questions/variables that are identical to those used in the study by Hernández and Martínez (2016) on binge-watching among the student population of the Catholic University of Murcia (UCAM), Spain, one of the few studies based on a similar population within the Spanish context, and permitting comparison between the two. In this way the study provides an analysis of the phenomenon along with a comparative and longitudinal dimension. Descriptive and multivariable statistical analysis was then carried out using the data collected from the questionnaire. Specifically, different variable analysis and regression models are presented, the usefulness of which has been proven in the contributions that have taken on marathon viewing analysis (Rubenking & Campanella, 2018; Walton-Pattison et al., 2018; Erickson et al., 2019).

So as to dig deeper into the scope of continuous viewing on the surveyed users, and given the need to transform those variables considered most influential into a single result, a unique and unpublished scale was developed taking into account: the number of episodes watched without taking a break, and the frequency with which they are watched and their duration. As a result of the crossing of said variables, and following the strategy for building indexes presented by Del Castillo (2004), a typology of audio-visual platform users was established, which was then used in the central analysis of the paper. More precisely, starting from the assumption that binge-watching takes place once at least two episodes or 2-4 hours of content have been watched (Stoldt, 2013; Perks, 2015; Petersen, 2016; Hernández & Martínez, 2016; Walton-Pattison et al., 2018), three ideal-type categories of users were established (Figure 1): “irregular” (those that

primarily watch two straight episodes, lasting on average 20-40 minutes each, at least once a week); “regular” (those that watch three episodes straight, lasting an average of 40-60 minutes each, twice a week); or “dedicated” (those who watch more than four episodes straight, lasting an average of 60 minutes each, more than three times a week).

Figure 1. Binge-watching Scale Categories



Source: own elaboration

In the second phase of our mixed method, to add a necessary qualitative perspective to the analysis (Flayell, Maurage & Billieux, 2017), two discussion groups were carried out (composed of six people): one composed of novice users (subscribing to only one platform); and the other composed of consolidated users (subscribing to at least two platforms). Taking into account Ibáñez’s requirements (1979), we started out with a homogenising characteristic for the discussion groups (“being a NNN student”), but through its design we looked to create internal heterogeneity: to do so we looked to find diverse student profiles in terms of their sex (through an equal number of women and men), age (through the balanced presence of undergraduate and postgraduate students), and university degrees (from science, engineering, social sciences or the humanities), with the aim of obtaining varying discourses. Next, we carried out content analysis of the different themes addressed in the groups (similar to those established in the questionnaire), followed by the creation of preanalytical conjectures from which the cleavages and discursive positions are derived (Conde, 2009). These were then opposed

to each other to form the semantic axes that synthesize all the information from the discussions.

In short, this mixed methodology provides an original approach to the binge-watching phenomenon, which is not usual to find in the recent literature reviews (Flayelle et al., 2020; Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020; Alimoradi et al., 2022).

3. RESULTS

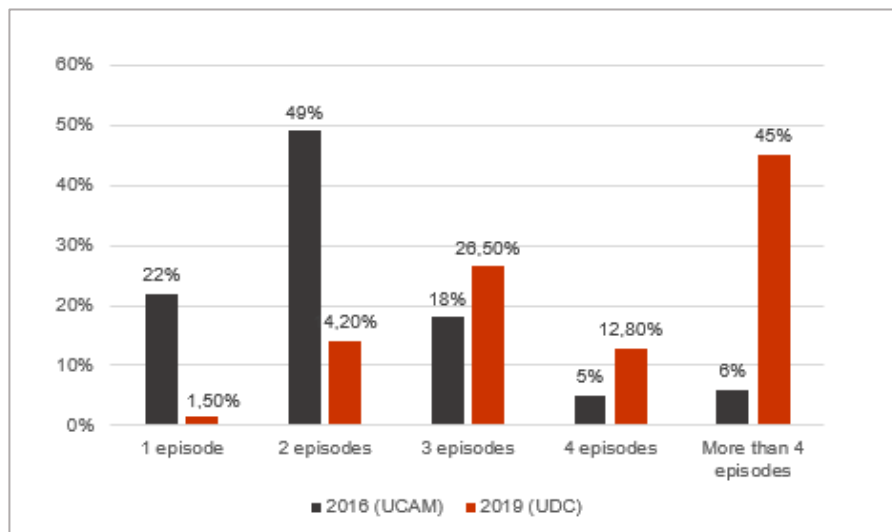
3.1. DIAGNOSIS: ACCESS, TIME AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

With regards to the audio-visual consumption on the various platforms, the greatest volume of answers points to a minimum of at least one access per week, with 1 to 5 hours spent on the platform. The second most common level of consumption consists of 2 or more accesses per week for a duration of 5-10 hours (31.1%). Thus, basing ourselves on the thresholds mentioned above, at least 44% of the analysed population are engaging in marathon-like televisual consumer practices.

When comparing these results with the study carried out by Hernández and Martínez (2016) at UCAM, there are noticeably big differences in the frequency of access and time spent on the platforms. Despite there being only three years between the two studies, the comparative consumption of series episodes has doubled in the analysed population (Figure 2). In fact, some 45% of the student population at UDC admits to being able to watch more than 4 episodes in one sitting, which indicates a clear increase in the intensity of continuous viewing.

By crossing the frequency of platform access and time spent variables, we can obtain the volume of the surveyed population that corresponds to the binge-watching categories scale. Some 28.7% of people can be considered binge-watching “dedicated”, while some 33% can be considered “regular”, and some 38.3% “irregular”.

Figure 2. How many episodes are you capable of watching in one sitting? (2016 - 2019)



Source: own elaboration

3.2. MOTIVATION: FUN, ENTERTAINING AND TIME CONTROL

When carrying out a descriptive evaluation of continuous viewing's scope, it is necessary to understand the motives behind the student body's participation in this type of consumption. Through a regression analysis, we hope to explain, as a dependent variable, the "Series are a way for me to have fun and relax" fact from a set of possible independent variables to be included in the final model (for example, analysing "series as a form of socialising with other groups/people through social networks", or series "as a source for daily conversation with friends and family", etc.). In this sense, there is no doubt that the primary motivation is the search for "personal entertainment". This single variable explains the 71.7% of variance in the dependent variable, and with a highly significant change in F (sig. <0.01). Therefore, the prevailing cause behind this type of consumption is hedonic, rather than social or pragmatic (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of the simple regression model (motivations)

R	R squared	R squared adjusted	Statistical changes	
			Change in R squared	Sig. Change in F
.847 ^a	.717	.716	.717	.000

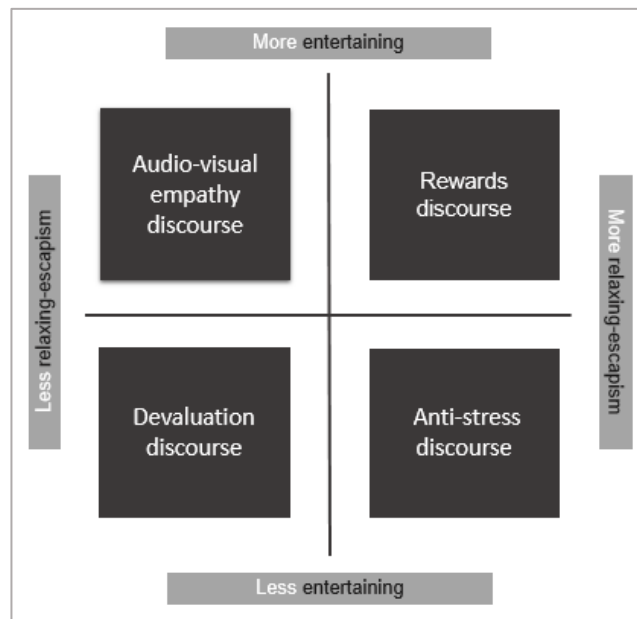
Dependent Variable: "Series are a way for me to have fun and relax"

Independent Variable: "Series are a great source of personal entertainment"

Source: own elaboration

The motivations were specifically addressed through the thematic analysis of the discussion, by adding the necessary aspects concerning the prevalence of hedonism in the quantitative results. Arising from this we have the first narrative configuration, where the “level of fun and relaxation produced by the series” axis crosses with the “level of entertainment provided by the series” axis, leading to four semantic spaces (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Motivations behind binge-watching



Source: own elaboration

First to emerge is a discourse around “audio-visual empathy”, which is characterised by the search for pure entertainment, which can be associated with low levels of relaxation or amusement. The participating students actually explain how they can come to “suffer” empathy for the situations that occur in the fiction that they are consuming.

This happens to me with “This Is Us”, it’s a great series, but I suffer every time I watch an episode, I cry and I cry till my tears run dry (GD1, female, aged 27).

I’m the same with “Game of Thrones”, which had been highly recommended to us. It’s none stop crazy (...) I started watching it with my partner. We said “let’s give it a go”. And that’s how we ended up watching all seven seasons and getting up to date. We were tense all the way through, it was agonising (GD1, male, aged 21).

The second of the semantic spaces, however, does correspond to a “rewards” discourse characterised by high entertainment and relaxation or amusement levels. The participants describe a situation where the consumption of on demand audio-visual content has become a way of rewarding oneself for completing work or chores:

In my case it's a means of escape (...) It's as if I'm rewarding myself. I say to myself, "come on, between now and then you study or you do whatever you have to do and after that you can watch an episode of whatever series you like", as if it were a prize. I don't know, it works for me, it keeps me focused (GD1, female, aged 24).

At the opposite end, there's the discourse called “devaluation”, with low levels of entertainment relaxation or amusement. In this situation they refer to current unattractive series:

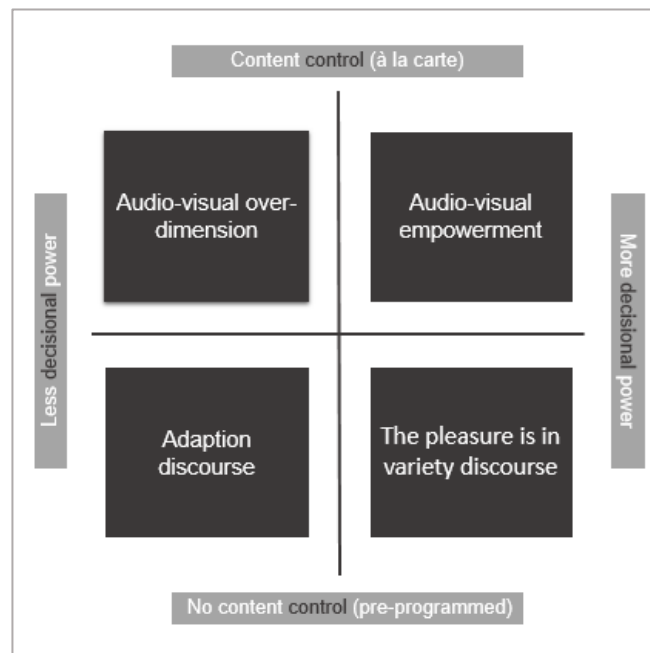
Actually, I think that "Atresmedia" has also developed a similar paying platform, where if you pay, however much, you can watch series like "Física o Química", "El Internado", series that we used to watch when we were young... who on earth is going to pay for that (GD2, male, aged 23).

The last of the discourses is a consequence of a more moderate and punctual type of binge-watching, which is normally associated with a higher level of amusement when understanding the content. This type of consumerism is called the “anti-stress” discourse, or punctual escapism:

For me, for example, when there's huge pressure to study... then it is like, well, maybe if you missed an episode from a previous week you watch it when you have some spare time (GD1, female, aged 27).

Two other dimensions appear in the discourse associated with marathon consumerism, which each add important information with regards to the consumers “visual empowerment” (aspects which have been less explored in the literature, and which are harder to measure with a questionnaire). In particular, these dimensions refer to the decisional power over content and the resulting control (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Audio-visual empowerment



Source: own elaboration

The first semantic space is defined by content control when faced with low decisional power, that is to say, it represents those who feel they do not have decisional control over the content that they are going to watch. It belongs to the “audio-visual over-dimension” discourse:

I think that what we have now is too much information which is very difficult to process (...) The fact that we have so many series, so much content (...) can overwhelm many people (GD1, male, aged 20).

The second space describes the situation where content control and decisional power converge. It arises when people feel they have absolute control of what they watch, and they decide how and when to watch it. It’s the “audio-visual empowerment” discourse:

I can watch them when I want, and whatever I want. I don’t have to wait for the TV to broadcast them episode by episode, I’ve got them all already (GD2, female, aged 19).

On the contrary, the third square represents low levels on both axis. In this “adaption discourse”, the situation is such that the person cannot choose the content they consume, and they adapt to the audio-visual content on offer at a precise moment:

Do I use the TV... well I'll have it on in the background while I'm on the computer, but they never have anything on. Sometimes "Neox" has things like "The Big Bang Theory", amongst others... because that's what's on at that time (GD2, male, aged 23).

The fourth semantic field encompasses those discourses where it is perceived that, amongst the huge variety on offer on the platforms, you have somewhere to choose the content that interests you, and thereby you experience a certain level of decisional power. This discourse is defined as "the pleasure is in variety":

Well I've still got things to choose from. I follow UFC, Futsal when it's on, boxing... on "Gol TV" or "Teledporte" (GD2, male, aged 25).

3.3. EMOTIONAL EFFECTS, LEISURE, ROUTINES AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Amongst other items, on a scale from 0 ("never") to 10 ("a lot"), the stand-out effects are those that refer to "disappointment in finding that there are no more episodes left to watch of the series you were watching" (6.2 points on average) or "reaching the end of the season and having to wait desperately for the next season" (6.9 points).

The second step involved carrying out an ANOVA, where the statistical significance of the difference between the averages of the binge-watching categories scale are established for the two variables or selected factors (see sig. <0.01 for the values corresponding to F in Table II). As the Games-Howell post-hoc test reveals (used once variance homogeneity has been discarded), the "irregular" users express effects when faced with "disappointment" or the "weight" that are significantly smaller than the "regular" users and above all "dedicated" users. The change in mood is more common in those people that engage in a more intensive consumption (Table 2).

Table 2. ANOVA

AUDIO VISUAL CONSUMPTION AND MOOD (0 = "NEVER" / 10 = "A LOT")								
VARIABLES	Binge-watching			ANOVA		Games-Howell		
	Irregular users (1)	Regular users (2)	Dedicated users (3)	F	Sig.	Sig. relations	Difference of averages (I-J)	Sig.
Disappointment in finding that there are no more episodes left to watch of the series you were watching	5.30	6.48	7.05	9.623	.000	1 & 2	-1.17766	.010
						1 & 3	-1.74498	.000
Reaching the end of the season and having to wait desperately for the next season	6.19	7.18	7.37	5.099	.007	1 & 2	-.99332	.031
						1 & 3	-1.17783	.014
ROUTINES AND AUDIO-VISUAL CONSUMPTION (0 = "NEVER" / 10 = "VERY FREQUENTLY")								
VARIABLES	Binge-watching			ANOVA		Games-Howell		
	Irregular users (1)	Regular users (2)	Dedicated users (3)	F	Sig.	Sig. relations	Difference of averages (I-J)	Sig.
Delaying a shower or bath	2.83	3.87	4.63	12.779	.000	1 & 2	-1.04115	.021
						1 & 3	-2.10037	.000
Leaving work or academic activities unfinished	2.64	3.73	4.90	14.797	.000	1 & 2	-1.08779	.016
						1 & 3	-2.25719	.000
						2 & 3	-1.1695	.026
Sleeping less	4.86	6.42	6.05	19.242	.000	1 & 2	-1.55496	.000
						1 & 3	-2.33072	.000
Doing housework	3.65	4.48	5.07	6.317	.002	1 & 3	-1.42467	.002
Not studying	2.86	3.96	5.00	13.981	.000	1 & 2	-1.10042	.011
						1 & 3	-2.13072	.000
						2 & 3	-1.0303	.050
SOCIAL RELATIONS AND AUDIO-VISUAL CONSUMPTION (0 = "TOTALLY DISAGREE" / 10 = "TOTALLY AGREE")								
VARIABLES	Binge-watching			ANOVA		Games-Howell		
	Irregular users (1)	Regular users (2)	Dedicated users (3)	F	Sig.	Sig. relations	Difference of averages (I-J)	Sig.
Series are a regular topic of conversation amongst my family and friends	5.26	6.40	6.99	13.509	.000	1 & 3	-1.932	.000
						1 & 2	-2.5528	.002
Series are another kind of conversation starter	5.29	6.25	6.63	6.612	.001	1 & 3	-1.8301	.028
						1 & 2	-2.2687	.002
Watching a series makes me feel included within a group or community, etc.	3.69	4.53	4.74	3.467	.032	1 & 3	-2.1008	.047

Source: own elaboration

On a scale of 0 ("never") to 10 ("very frequently"), we assessed to what degree the participants stopped doing a series of actions related to their habits, leisure and social relations. The points associated with leisure activities (sport, partying or going for a walk,

etc.) show that these values are on the lower end of the scale (on average scoring just over three). That is to say that the users consider that they haven't given up on their leisure activities to binge-watch (an important point with regards to the previously observed hedonic motivation). This result was subsequently supported by the focus groups. The use of audio-visual platforms is not considered to be replacing other leisure activities, but, rather, is considered a non-exclusive activity in and of itself:

I like to dance and watch Netflix (GD2, Female, aged 24).

I like to listen to music, go to concerts, read about music, as well as read about other things that aren't music. And... watch series, go out with friends, go for walks... (GD1, Female, aged 27).

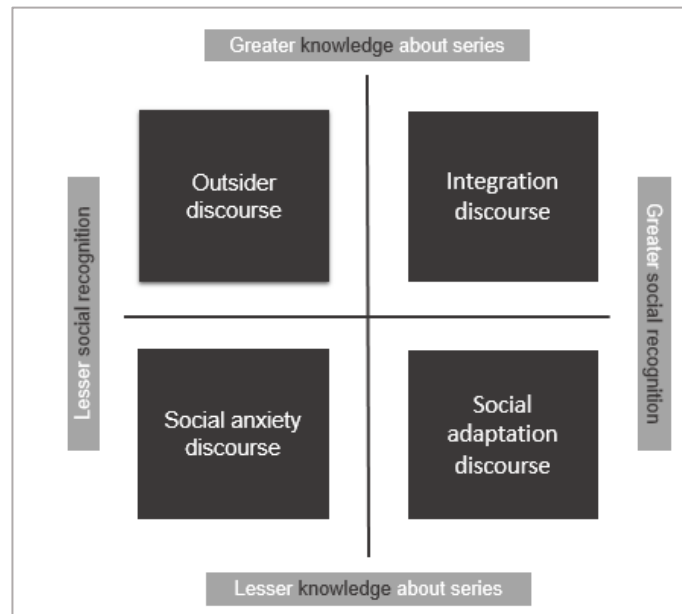
By the same token, we asked about any changes to their daily routine, where 0 equals "never" and 10 equals "very regularly". On this point the effects of marathon series watching are a lot clearer than with leisure activities. It appears that "sleeping less" (6.0 points on average) or "stopping doing housework" (4.3 points) occur frequently when individuals engage in this behaviour.

If we carry out a new ANOVA by contrasting the difference between the averages of the items that reflect different routines and categories from the binge-watching scale (see sig. <0.01 from the Games-Howell post-hoc test from Table II), the change in said routines is significantly greater in "dedicated" users than in "regular" or "irregular" users.

With regards to those items that measure the impact on the social relations of the surveyed population, two of them achieve a clearly significant difference in averages (see sig. <0.01 from Table II) relating the scale categories. Therefore, as the habit goes from "irregular" to "dedicated" so it becomes clearer that the viewed content becomes the foundation for conversation with family and others. In contrast, the variable which links binge-watching with group social interactions ("watching a series makes me feel included within a group or community", etc.), averages lower values. They vary from 3.7 points for "irregular" users to 4.7 for "dedicated" users. The difference in averages is not statistically significant (see sig. <0.01 from Table II).

The discourse analysis demonstrates that the knowledge of series influences the social recognition or adaptability of its consumers. Nonetheless, specific mentions that series consumption is a critical element in social integration are few. Starting from this casuistry, we arrive at the last of our narrative configurations (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Changes in Social Relations



Source: own elaboration

The first semantic space represents the discourse where there is a notably greater knowledge of serial fiction, which implicitly leads to lower social recognition, given that the series that are watched are relatively unknown. This discourse is known as the “outsider”:

I watch many that are not... that no one has heard of (...) and of course, I end up being the only one hooked on a series that everyone has seen (GD1, Female, aged 23).

The second square involves a situation where one person alone has ample knowledge of different series, and for whom this is a fundamental necessity to be not only socially recognised, but also “integrated” into a social group:

In some ways watching them allows you to integrate (GD1, Female, aged 23).

At the opposite end, we have the third of the semantic spaces, which assumes that not having an ample knowledge of current series leads to a loss of social recognition. In this way the projected discourse is that of an undesired situation, including “social anxiety”:

I remember watching “Física o Química” in high school, where if you hadn’t seen the latest episode you weren’t a part of the conversation (...) Watching series is now a part of my life (GD1, Female, aged 27).

Finally, the fourth space refers to a low knowledge of serialised fiction, forcing the user to concentrate on watching a specific series without which they will not be socially recognised. This discourse is therefore called “social adaptation”:

Of course, there are then series that everyone watches... I mean, if you watch “Game of Thrones” and there’s always someone else who watches it too. Just by watching that one, you’ve got something to talk about (GD2, Female, aged 19).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The research shows that almost all University population are binge-watchers so the terms have changed and a new scale is necessary for identifying the level of engagement with binge-watching behavior from now (RQ1). The comparative analysis has revealed that there has been an important increase in marathon watching in a short period of time (three years) in Spain before the pandemic started, which is remarkable on its own, and also substantially confirms that leisure habits in general, and audio-visual consumption in particular, continuous evolving. 29.7% should be considered “dedicated binge watchers”. We don’t know if this audio-visual consumption trend has a boundary and where it is, but this is a moving concept.

The “entertainment and relaxation” produced by continuous content watching is primarily explained through hedonic behaviours, much more than through other social/rational or pragmatic elements. The values associated with platforms are quality, quantity, novelty and ease of use. The new content implies a pleasurable escape from the daily grind for its users. The intensity in apparent content control offered by the platforms, and as a consequence, the apparent decisional power obtained from this are

the main axis along which the dominant discourses are formed. In this sense, the constantly renewed audio-visual catalogue model is reinforced when faced with viewing habits seduced by quantity, apparent variety, novelty (continuous new content) and decisional capacity.

If, up until now, we have argued over saturation and information overload in current society, generating the infotoxification of the population (Urbano, 2010), we also need to reflect on the excessive entertainment offer or the deluge of fiction tv series we are currently witnessing. Fictoxification (fiction + intoxication) may be beneficial to the industry, but it could saturate users' free time, shifting social habits and other important routines. On top of this, we mustn't forget that fictional series transmit values, models of conduct, representation and stereotypes (Galán Fajardo, 2006). Consequently, the capacity to select, review and self-assess our own media diet (Pérez-Alaejos et al., 2020; Ferrés & Piscitelli, 2012) has become a fundamental requirement in the education of the young.

Under the new model, the user takes on the role of auto-TV-programmer, however the empowerment discourse contrasts with the loyalty in attention and dedicated time required (ever increasing), which necessarily translates into a need to be able to prioritise, self-limit and organise oneself, in a way that not all young people are conscious. Faced with the current situation, there needs to be an intensification in the training in media content selection and analysis, critical thinking and time management.

Two different types of viewing are clearly identified in a pre-pandemic reality. The first is committed or prioritised viewing (with a high attention level, high dependence and sympathy with regards to the story and characters), and secondary or complimentary viewing (less attention is paid to the content, there is a lower dependence, and connection with the text). Both types of viewing are marathon habits, and normally complement each other.

The effects of series marathons are clearly, emotional and positively correlate with the intensity of the habit (RQ2). To which other effects related to the interaction between a high level of investment in time and daily activities (principally less sleep and delaying

chores) needs to be added. Parallel to this, the multitasking discourse appears, where multitasking is the *modus operandi* allowing simultaneous activities, in detriment to those abilities such as concentration and focus.

It is important to highlight that the habit of continuous series watching, including at the highest levels of dedication, is a hedonic consumption, which being useful as a base for conversation or a certain level of social recognition, does not facilitate the creation of durable social links, or the social integration into a group or community. Consequently, this study demonstrates how, in the student body analysed, binge-watching encourages the creation of a socially fragile society belonging to liquid modernity (Bauman, 2005; 2007).

Suffice to say, that from a methodological point of view, the inter-method sequencing developed here is original and necessary for, as well as bringing us closer to a global and deeper understanding of the subject (Rodríguez, 2005), taking apart a multifaceted phenomenon through the interaction of quantitative and qualitative evidence.

Finally, responding to the phenomenon's importance and growth, it should be highlighted that young people need to be conscious of the need for critical audio-visual consumption. Media education should also include this perspective (Pérez-Alaejos et al., 2020; Gutiérrez & Tyner, 2012) on marathon viewing. Selective capacities and pre-established criteria are required: 1) when faced with a never ending catalogue that is constantly replenished by audio-visual companies; 2) when faced with a high level of leisure time dedicated to this practice, which necessarily takes away space for other activities; 3) and finally when faced with a level of immersion that certain content achieves, which prioritises the need for a permanent level of criticism which allows for distancing and reflection, beyond the simple act of enjoyment.

The warnings coming from the viewing of so-called pseudo content (Sartori, 1998) need to be extended to the fiction consumption as pure entertainment or an escape from reality. Especially since the data suggests that it is not a passing fancy, but a phenomenon that is experiencing evolution and exponential growth.

The main limitation of the study is the time frame of the data collected, but it is considered of interest as a point of comparison for subsequent analyzes since the pre-pandemic era.

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