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Uncovering the motivations behind the consumption of digital movie experiences in the Covid-19 era

Abstract
The outbreak of the coronavirus has drastically impacted the arts and culture consumption globally. The films and series industry has experienced negative changes (e.g., the interruption of production, the shutdown of cinemas), but also positive adjustments (e.g., an increase in demand for digital content). In this new context, this exploratory research aims to understand individuals' motivations to watch films and series generally and more specifically during the lockdown period. This study involves theoretical and practical contributions that can guide the audiovisual industry in a digitalized era. The results show that the psychological state encountered within the lockdown influences "*why*" consumers choose films and series.

Key words
Films and series consumption, motivations, Covid-19, online platforms, digitalization, uses and gratification theory

Résumé
La pandémie de la Covid-19 a considérablement impacté la consommation des produits artistiques et culturels dans le monde. L'industrie audiovisuelle a été affecté par des évènements néfastes (ex., l'interruption de la production, la fermeture de cinémas), mais a aussi connu des ajustements positifs (ex., une augmentation de la demande de contenu numérique). Dans ce nouveau contexte, cette recherche exploratoire vise à mieux comprendre les motivations des individus à regarder des films et séries en général et plus spécifiquement pendant la période de confinement. Cette étude implique des contributions théoriques et pratiques qui peuvent guider l'industrie audiovisuelle dans cette nouvelle ère de numérisation. Les résultats démontrent que l'état psychologique rencontré au cours du confinement influence les motivations de la consommation de films et séries.

Mots clés

Consommation de films et séries, motivations, Covid-19, plateformes en ligne, digitalisation, théorie des usages et gratification

1. Introduction

The coronavirus outbreak was a major incident that has shaken the world. On 11th March 2020, COVID-19 was declared as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization. Governments have taken severe measures globally in order to reduce the spread of the virus. Due to confinements and lockdowns, all social, cultural and leisure activities have been temporarily suspended (Radermecker, 2021). Individuals were compelled to stay at home and endure a quarantine which is often an unpleasant experience as it involves the separation from the loved ones, the loss of freedom, the uncertainty about the future and the boredom (Brooks et al, 2020). The drastic changes were not only limited to consumers as individuals, but also challenged the economy as a whole. Several sectors were impacted by this outrageous situation such as airlines, tourism, events, and leisure (Ibrus and Teinemaa, 2020; Travkina et al., 2020; Radermecker, 2021). Considered as non-essential businesses, cinemas have been shut down for a long period due to social distancing measures. Furthermore, films and series production have stopped[1] with an indefinite deadline. By contrast, digital access has encountered a rising demand. Consumers worldwide have therefore used technology to complement their daily activities.

Regarding leisure, users relied on playing videogames, streaming films, series and music, and watching TV (Marston, Musselwhite, and Hadley, 2020). Emerging technologies and massive digitalization have offered new forms of cultural experiences such as live concerts, virtual exhibitions and museum tours, digital shows and performances. "*Streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video are winners of the crisis*" (Mikos, 2020, p.31). For instance, Netflix's[2] customer base has increased by 16 million people in the first quarter alone (Statista). Additionally, as people experience anxiety during the lockdown period, they adopt a binge-watching behavior in order to pass time, escape boredom, relieve stress, and overcome loneliness (Dixit et al., 2020).

Various researchers worldwide have studied the media consumption trends and the arts and culture consumption patterns since the outbreak of the coronavirus (Ibrus and Teinemaa, 2020; Marques and Giolo, 2020; Mikos, 2020; Dixit et al., 2020). The complexity of the consumer behavior, the diversity of his expectations and needs, as well as the multi-facedness and richness of the composition of the cultural offers makes it a very interesting area of investigation (Bourgeon-Renault et al., 2003).

The films and series industry constitutes a very promising field of research for marketers mainly because of the variety of the expectations and behaviors of the consumers which makes it an ideal space for testing theoretical models and trying to improve them. Although the increase of films and series consumption in the Covid-19 era, a lack of research explaining this rise is noticed. Radermecker (2021) highlights the importance of examining consumption patterns within each subsector of arts and culture (e.g., films and series) in order to better respond to individuals' changing needs and expectations, and to support cultural institutions and industries in their decision-making process. Consequently, this exploratory research attempts to understand consumers' motivations to watch movies and series mainly in the Covid-19 context.

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[1] https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/mar/19/loss-of-jobs-income-film-industry-hollywood-coronavirus-pandemic-covid-19
[2] https://www.statista.com/chart/21465/global-paid-net-subscriber-additions-by-netflix/

1. Literature review

Arts has been defined as "*the practice of creating perceptible forms expressive of human feeling*" (Langer, 1966, p.6), and as "*a unique feature of human experience*" (Leder et al., 2012, p.1). Arts and culture consumption have bloomed over the past few decades. Gay et al. (2018) have demonstrated that arts are essential to human development as it enhances cognitive, social and behavioral aptitudes.

Various reasons can explain arts and culture consumption: education, leisure, evasion, relaxation, and self-reflexivity (Russell and Levy, 2012). Such consumption is multifaceted: it might be consumed individually or collectively, indoor or outdoor, in-person or virtual. Arts consumption is not limited to the purchase of tangible goods (works of art, books, DVDs, CDs, etc.) but also involves a wide range of experiences: attending a concert or a play, visiting a museum or an exhibition, or going out to the cinema (Radermecker, 2021).

The arts and culture consumption is characterized by its experiential dimension (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Colbert and St James, 2014). The experiential marketing approach is not restricted to the rational side of the customer behavior: consumers seek functional, symbolic, social, and emotional benefits (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Schmitt, 1999; Colbert and St James, 2014). Generally, the motivations that drive the consumption of cultural experiences are (1) aesthetic emotions; (2) leisure; (3) escapism; (4) intellectual enrichment; (5) social distinction and (6) social interactions and hedonism (Debenedetti, 2001).

Among one of the most interesting cultural experiences is film and series consumption. Film is an experiential product as it relates to fantasies, feelings and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Its consumption is hedonic by nature, allowing consumers to escape everyday life by delivering a pleasurable and memorable experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Lee et al., 2017). Film consumption is also considered as a source of stimulation and social bonding (Aurier, Evrard, and N'goala, 2004).

Several studies have focused on film consumption in movie theatres, particularly on the motivations influencing consumers' decisions (Ghariani, Touzani, and Creton, 2015). As a matter of fact, a study in Finland has shown that cinema audiences are motivated by experiences, relaxation, aesthetics, art, popularity and critiques, change, and information (Möller and Karppinen, 1983). Furthermore, Austin (1986) has identified "*learning and information, forget and get away, enjoyable and pleasant activity, pass-time, relieve loneliness, behavioral resources and learning about self*" as motivations of moviegoing groups. Moviegoers seek self-escape, self-development or entertainment value (Tesser, Millar, and Wu, 1988). Gazley, Clark, and Sinha (2011) have added that the motivations to go to the cinema include the genre of the film, the critical reviews, word-of-mouth, and the country-of-origin.

The film industry has been digitalized allowing new means of distribution (Lobato, 2009) such as Netflix, HBO, Hulu, and Amazon Prime Video. This shift towards digital experiences has significantly changed the way audiences consume media as they have gained access to a wide range of content: films, series, shows, and documentaries (Kehoe and Mateer, 2015). Hence, scholars have shown a growing interest in understanding consumer behavior on the different legal and illegal platforms (Hart, Kerrigan, and Lehn, 2016; Henkel, James, and Croce, 2016).

Online platforms have drastically changed how consumers access, watch, and interact with video-content (Governo, Teixeira, and Brochado, 2020). Binge-watching has been examined as a rising online films and series consumption trend (Pittman and Sheehan, 2015; Shim and Kim, 2018; Steiner and Xu, 2020).

Uses and gratification theory: a framework for films consumption

Uses and gratification theory was introduced by Katz (1959) as a framework for motivation discovery in the mass media usage and access. It has been introduced in the context of traditional media (TV, Radio, magazines) and then has been extended to cover other research areas including e-consumer behavior (Luo, 2002). Scholars have adopted the U&G theory in the context of motivations towards film consumption online (Table 1).

Table 1: An overview of Uses and Gratifications Theory applications

Authors (Year)	Area of application	Results
Pittman and Sheehan (2015)	Motivations for binge watching on Netflix	Relaxation, engagement, social, and hedonism
Henkel, James, and Croce (2016)	Motivations towards film consumption on legal vs. illegal platforms	Motivations towards film consumption on legal platforms: pleasure seeking, credibility and status seeking, social relationship seeking, escape seeking needs. Motivations towards film consumption on illegal platforms: free content, fast accessibility.
Shim and Kim (2018)	Motivations for binge watching	Enjoyment, recommendations of others, perceived control, and fandom
Steiner and Xu (2020)	Motivations for binge watching	Catching up, relaxation, sense of completion, cultural inclusion, and improved viewing experience.
Camilleri and Falzon (2020)	Motivations to use online streaming services	Need for information and entertainment, emotional gratifications (distraction into a better mood and relax in leisure time).

2. Research approach

For this research, qualitive methods have been adopted in order to explore consumers behavior towards film and series consumption in general, and particularly under the lockdown period. An interview guide has been designed into 3 main themes: (1) films and series consumption pre COVID-19; (2) films and series consumption during the lockdown[3]; and (3) attitudes towards films and series consumption in the future (Appendix1).

Interviewees were asked to share their opinions and feelings as freely as possible. To unleash consumer's latent motivations and to further engage them in the interview, an association technique has been used (Appendix 2).

20 semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted until reaching the theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The sample was composed of Tunisian films and series. Indeed, Tunisia has exhibited a growing investment in the cultural and creative sector (Hariri and Kassis, 2017) especially since after the Jasmin Revolution. Public institutions and NGOs have demonstrated a rising interest in this area throughout events, conferences and seminars (Azouzi and Ben Rayana, 2018). This new framework has allowed the democratization of access to arts throughout festivals such as FIFAK (Festival International du Film Amateur de Kélibia), MANARAT, GABES CINEMA FEN[4], and the opening of cinemas like Pathé and L'Agora. Further, numerous startups and creative enterprises have emerged such as Artify[5], the first legal VoD platform specialized in film distribution.

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[3] https://www.france24.com/en/20200320-tunisia-orders-general-lockdown-in-bid-to-contain-coronavirus
[4] http://gabescinemafen.com/
[5] https://artify.tn/en/

The sample was comprised of films and series consumers aged between 16 and 38 years old (Appendix 3).The purpose of choosing this range is that online streaming platforms are dominantly being used by young adults. According to Statista, in the United States, 65% of Netflix's subscribers are aged 18-29 years old[6]. The interviews lasted between 40 min and 1h40 min. All of them were recorded after receiving the respondent's approvals, and then were entirely transcribed. A thematic analysis was performed manually.

3. Findings

Motivations towards films and series consumption in the pre-COVID 19 context

Various motivations have been identified for films and series consumption in the pre COVID-19 period: pass time, education, leisure and entertainment, culture, immersion and escapism (Appendix 4).

Respondents were eager to discover new cultures and learn about other countries' traditions and customs. One of them asserted: "*Films and series allow me to discover new traditions, culture, and ways of life. For example, I can learn about Americans, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and even Turkish lifestyles*" (E, 20). In fact, films or series are considered as rich resources as they can enhance the individual's cultural awareness and knowledge (Roell, 2010).

Films and series were viewed as an effective way to pass time. An interviewee declared: "*I usually watch series whenever I have free-time… the more free-time I have, the more I watch series*" (S, 23). It has been shown that consumers use films and series as an activity to occupy idle time and relieve boredom (Rubin, 1983). "*If I have nothing to do or if I'm bored, I watch a film*" (H, 26).Watching films can help individuals learn a new language (Birulés-Muntané and Soto-Faraco, 2016) and change their attitudes and behavior (Kubrak, 2020). The respondents have emphasized the importance of exposure to films and series in the process of learning foreign languages. "*I only watch Netflix's DARK series to learn German*" (G, 26). Moreover, watching films and series has been considered as a great way to learn life lessons. "*Films and series usually convey useful and practical messages which can help us in our life, sometimes facilitate decision-making in certain situations… they can even change our point of view and guide us to behave righteously and to think carefully*" (H, 26).

Pleasure in the watching experience is derived from fantasies, feelings, and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Hart, Kerrigan, and Vom Lehn, 2016). Escape can occur when viewing films or series as many feelings and emotions arise. While describing his experience, one of the respondents said: "*For me, it's an immersive experience. I imagine myself in the place of the main characters, I get attached to them, to their stories and especially to the emotions they release… It helps me escape from the ordinary and travel to another world*" (I, 23).

Films and series consumption is considered as an amusing activity as it has been stated: "*I watch films because it's entertains me… it's an enjoyable experience*" (A, 23). Watching films or series helps individuals experience positive and pleasant emotions. "*I immerse myself in a moment of pleasure, a moment of pure happiness, of well-being, and of relaxation.*" (I, 23). This activity gratifies consumers on an affective level by responding to their pleasure-seeking needs (Henkel, James, and Croce, 2016).

A shift towards a digital consumption of films and series

One of the major findings of this research is that consumers have turned to use digital legal and illegal platforms for various reasons: (a) convenience "*it's easy and simple… it doesn't require that much effort*" (Y, 22); (b) variety of content "*everything is available online with an enormous catalog of content*" (M, 27); (c) technological control of content "*I can pause*

and go to the bathroom whenever I want… I can also rewind and fast-forward" (S, 23), "*I can change the language I want or even add subtitles*" (B, 16); (d) trendy "*television is old-fashioned and outdated… watching online is cool*" (Y, 22), "*unlike TV and cinema, you can always find new films and series to watch online, every day and at any time*" (G, 26).

Motivations towards films and series consumption during the lockdown

Experiencing lockdown is often unpleasant, individuals have thus used binge-watching as a coping-mechanism (Brooks et al, 2020). Almost all respondents asserted that films and series consumption has significantly increased to an average time of 5-6 hours per day. One of them stated: "*My consumption of films and series has almost tripled… I spend all my time watching series*" (E, 20). The situation has changed *why* consumers watch films and series. They mainly do it to pass time and escape boredom, to run away from emotional difficulties, and to ensure they keep themselves up to date (Appendix 5).

As individuals have little to do, most of them engage in binge-watching to pass time. "*I had nothing to do, so I spent most of my time watching series to avoid boredom*" (M, 27). "*I watched random stuff, nothing special or extraordinary… I just wanted time to pass*" (S, 23). Pass time has been identified as a psychological motivation for binge-watching during the lockdown as it leads to the immediate gratification of the consumers' needs (Dixit et al., 2020).

Various respondents have stated that they have experienced anxiety and stress during lockdown. "*The confinement was a very stressful period for me, I panicked a lot and had several emotional breakdowns. I was upset by the situation, so I watched films to forget what was happening*" (A, 23). Consumers have used media in general, and particularly films and series to escape from emotional difficulties, to relieve stress, and to overcome loneliness (Camilleri and Falzon, 2020). "*It helps me shutdown my mind, and get some rest*" (S, 22).

Despite being away from each other, individuals have sustained their relationships through using social media platforms (Dixit et al., 2020). "*Every night, I had a video call with some of my friends, and we usually share films and series suggestions*" (M, 27). 11 interviewees have stated that they have increasingly interacted with their acquaintances to share their thoughts and preferences about films and series. "*I watched Game of Thrones just because my friends pushed me to…otherwise I would have not watched it*" (B, 23). "*Everyone was watching Choufli Hal and sharing anecdotes about it… so eventually I had to keep-up with the trend*" (S, 38).

4. Discussion & conclusions

Results suggest that various motivations underpin consumer's interest in films and series. In the pre-COVID19 era, consumers usually watch films and series mainly to (a) cultivate themselves about other countries, traditions, and customs; (b) pass time and escape boredom; (c) educate themselves by learning new languages and life lessons; (d) live an immersive experience through the actor's emotions and feelings; and (e) entertain themselves and enjoy a pleasurable moment (Henkel, James, and Croce, 2016).

The situation of the pandemic has led to a global lockdown that was felt differently by consumers worldwide. Many individuals who experienced anxiety, loneliness, and boredom have developed coping mechanisms to face this unpredicted context (Dixit et al., 2020). For instance, individuals have increased their films and series consumption as they have little to do (Mikos, 2020). There has been a shift in *why* consumers watch films and series during the lockdown to: (a) pass time: as they have an abundant amount of free time, individuals binge-watched most of the time to escape boredom; (b) run away from emotional difficulties: some people experience stress, fear, sadness, and even depression due to the difficult context. Thus, they consume films and series to forget about their state-of-mind and engage in a positive and pleasant moment; (c) social influence: during the lockdown, individuals have maintained

their relationships through using social media. The power of recommendation have played a major role in influencing consumer's choices of films and series.

This study contributes to the consumer behavior literature by exploring individuals' motivations towards films and series consumption under a global crisis. It allows a better understanding of consumer's needs and expectations in terms of films and series preferences. This research shows that psychological state influences media consumption (Shim and Kim, 2018). Consequently, marketers can better adapt their offering and communication accordingly. For example, it would be interesting to develop an emotion-based system for films and series recommendation in online platforms to better tailor the offering to the consumer's current state of mind. From another perspective, the results show that consumers usually watch films and series for cultural and educational purposes. Thus, producers ought to create a variety of content that matches customers' preferences. Moreover, the popularity of online consumption can suggest new directions to the audiovisual industry (Ibrus and Teinemaa, 2020). In fact, films and series distributors should shift to online platforms to better reach their target customers. Cinemas and movies theatres are threatened by digitalization, which makes change inevitable for survival.

This research is not exempt from limitations. First, the data was only collected in Tunisia. Second, the sample was restricted to young consumers aged between 16-38 years old. Finally, the size of the sample is not large enough to meet a required degree of representativeness, but this is due to the exploratory nature of this research.

The need for further research is important in order to generalize the results by applying quantitative methods on a larger sample. This study can also be carried out in other countries to explore relevant cultural similarities and differences. Moreover, future studies can investigate motivations towards films and series consumption based on socio-demographic characteristics.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

1. Arts and culture consumption
What is art and culture according to you ?
Among these activities, which one do you prefer?
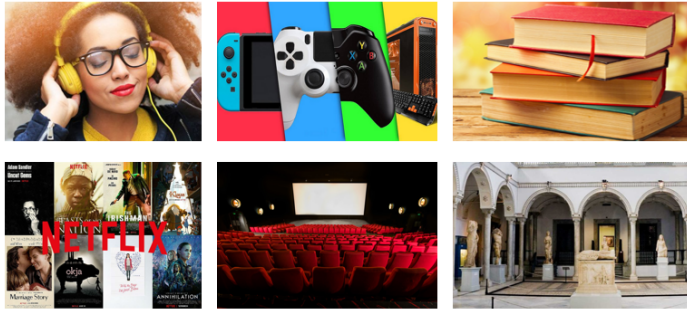
2. Films and series consumption pre-COVID 19

Tell me about your films and series consumption behavior
- a. Cinema
- b. TV
- c. Digital platforms

When and where do you watch films and series? Why?

Do you watch films and series alone, with family, or with friends? Why?

How do you choose a film or a series? Tell me about the decision-making process…

3. Films and series consumption during the lockdown

Can you share with me your thoughts about the lockdown period?

Tell me about your films and series consumption behavior during the lockdown period

Why did you watch films/series?

What did you watch? Why?

How did you choose films and series?

Was watching films and series during the lockdown important / beneficial? Why?

4. Films and series consumption post lockdown

How do you see your future films and series consumption?

Appendix 2: Association Technique

1. TV	A. Variety of content
2. Films	B. Immersion & escapism
3. Cinema	C. Pass-time
4. Netflix	D. Leisure & entertainment
5. YouTube	E. Education & Culture
6. Streaming	F. Free of charge
7. Series	G. Relaxation

Appendix 3: Interviewees profile

	Respondent	Gender	Age	Profession
R1	Ghazi	Male	27	Employee /sports coach

R2	Sarah	Female	22	Student
R3	Yasmine	Female	22	Student
R4	Skander	Male	23	Student
R5	Ahlem	Female	23	Student
R6	Zied	Male	27	Engineer
R7	Cyrine	Female	23	Student / employee in a radio
R8	Ismail	Male	23	Student
R9	Ghaith	Male	26	Anesthesiologist
R10	Eya	Female	20	Student
R11	Baya	Female	16	Student
R12	Hana	Female	26	Party planner
R13	Mariem	Female	25	Administrative and financial manager
R14	Kawther	Female	26	Finance executive
R15	Malek	Male	27	Hotel official
R16	Nadim	Male	23	Student / swimming teacher
R17	Sonia	Female	38	Accounting manager
R18	Baya	Female	23	Student
R19	Malek	Female	24	Student
R20	Seif	Male	20	Student

Appendix 4: Motivations towards films and series consumption (pre-COVID)

	Verbatim	Occurrence
Culture	"*To discover new traditions, culture, and ways of life.*" (E, 20)	16
	"*I want to learn about other countries*" (M, 24)	12
	"*I enjoy watching historical movies and documentaries*" (A, 23)	5
Pass-time	"*I just want to pass time*" (S, 38)	12
	"*I watch films or series whenever I'm bored*" (S, 23)	5
Education	"F*ilms help me practice English through listening*" (S, 23)	8
	"*I can acquire life lessons only by watching how actors respond to different situations*" (H, 26)	4
Immersion & escapism	"*I can escape from the ordinary and travel to another world*" (I, 23)	7
Leisure & entertainment	"*It's an entertaining moment… an enjoyable experience*" (A, 23)	5

Appendix 5: Motivations towards films and series consumption (during the lockdown)

	Verbatim	Occurrence
Pass time	"*there was a lot of free time, I had nothing to do… so I spent all day watching series*" (M, 27)	33
Run from emotional difficulties	"*it was a stressful period, I wanted to get away… forget what was happening around me*" (N, 24)	30
Social influence	"*I was influenced by my friend's recommendations*" (B, 23)	11