

# Binge-watching among Mexican college students

## La práctica del *binge-watching* entre estudiantes universitarios mexicanos

*A prática de binge-watching entre estudantes universitários mexicanos*

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**ABSTRACT** | The popularization of streaming platforms favors other ways of consuming audiovisual content, such as the marathon of TV series (binge-watching). This practice was explored among 457 young Mexican university students between 18 and 25 years old, to ascertain the factors that motivate it, as well as their perceptions on the possible effects on their well-being and academic performance. The project approach is mixed. Initially, there were six discussion groups, with a total of 30 participants, followed by an online survey. It was found that participants watch on mobile devices, prefer to watch on weekends and holidays, whenever they “have time”, or at night. Ideally, they watch marathons alone but sometimes they do it with family, friends, or romantic partners, either in person or remotely. The reasons are relaxing, socializing, and learning new things. They also conceive it as an escape to face difficult emotional situations, such as those experienced during the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were aware of the potential physical effects of marathon watching, but only a minority reported experiencing them. The effects of bingewatching on their academic life are perceived as limited, since they keep the practice under control, with some eventual oversight.

**KEYWORDS:** television audiences; television marathon; video-on-demand; reception studies.

### HOW TO CITE

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**RESUMEN** | *La popularización de las plataformas de streaming favorece otras maneras de consumir contenidos audiovisuales, como el maratón de series televisivas (binge-watching). Se exploró esta práctica entre 457 jóvenes universitarios mexicanos entre 18 y 25 años de edad para aclarar los factores que la motivan, así como sus percepciones sobre los posibles efectos en su bienestar y desempeño académico. El enfoque del proyecto es mixto. Se realizaron seis grupos de discusión iniciales, con 30 participantes en total, y una encuesta en línea posterior. Se halló que los participantes miran en dispositivos móviles, prefieren ver durante los fines de semana y vacaciones, cuando “tienen tiempo”, o por la noche. Idealmente, miran los maratones a solas, pero en ocasiones lo hacen con familiares, amigos o parejas sentimentales, ya sea de manera presencial o remota. Los motivos son relajarse, socializar y aprender cosas nuevas. También lo conciben como un escape para afrontar situaciones emocionales difíciles, como las vividas durante el confinamiento causado por la pandemia por COVID-19. Los participantes se mostraron conscientes de los posibles efectos físicos de ver maratones, pero solo una minoría indicó haberlos experimentado. Los efectos del binge-watching en su vida académica son percibidos como limitados, pues mantienen la práctica bajo control, con algún eventual descuido.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** audiencias de televisión; maratones televisivos; video en demanda; estudios de recepción.

**RESUMO** | *A popularização das plataformas de streaming favorece outras formas de consumo de conteúdo audiovisual, como o binge-watching. Esta prática foi explorada entre 457 jovens universitários mexicanos entre 18 e 25 anos para esclarecer os fatores que a motivam, bem como suas percepções sobre os possíveis efeitos em seu bem-estar e desempenho acadêmico. A abordagem do projeto é mista. Foram realizados seis grupos de discussão iniciais, com 30 participantes no total, e uma pesquisa online subsequente. Verificou-se que os participantes assistem em dispositivos móveis, preferem assistir nos finais de semana e feriados, sempre que “têm tempo” ou à noite. Idealmente, eles assistem as maratonas sozinhos, mas às vezes o fazem com familiares, amigos ou parceiros românticos, pessoalmente ou remotamente. As razões são para relaxar, socializar e aprender coisas novas. Eles também o concebem como uma fuga para enfrentar situações emocionais difíceis, como as vivenciadas durante o confinamento causado pela pandemia do COVID-19. Os participantes estavam cientes dos potenciais efeitos físicos do binge-watching, mas apenas uma minoria relatou experimentá-los. Os efeitos do binge-watching em sua vida acadêmica são percebidos como limitados, pois mantêm a prática sob controle, com algum eventual descuido.*

**PALAVRAS CHAVE:** audiências de televisão; maratonas de televisão; Vídeo sob demanda; estudos de recepção.

## INTRODUCTION

Watching series or movie marathons is a practice that emerged with the availability of video cassette players, became popular with the DVD and is currently in vogue due to the technical possibilities of the various streaming platforms (Jenner, 2020). In everyday language, a marathon refers to watching several episodes of the same show or several films of the same saga in a single sitting. In English, this practice is known as binge-watching (BW), a term that has a negative connotation as it is associated with other behaviors that represent excessive indulgence and debauchery, such as binge-eating and binge-drinking. The term binge-watching was first popularized in the press and picked up by academia, although some authors prefer to use the term marathon (Perks, 2015). Notably in this article, both meanings are used interchangeably, as BW is not part of everyday usage in Spanish, but it is the term that appears in almost all of the scientific literature on the phenomenon.

Although the construct still generates debate due to the difficulty in determining the duration or number of episodes that constitute it (Flayelle et al., 2020b; Vaterlaus et al., 2019; Viens & Farrar, 2021), it has recently been proposed that BW is “a consumption of more than one episode of the same serial video content in a single sitting, in one’s own time and at one’s own pace” (Merikivi et al., 2020, p. 702). An alternative definition states that BW refers to “long periods of concentrated and deliberate viewing of sequential television content that is generally narrative, dramatic and suspenseful in nature” (Rubenking & Bracken, 2020, p. 6). The first definition emphasizes the autonomy of the viewer, who chooses the program, time of day, device, and duration of each session, while the second emphasizes the attitude, regularly focused, since it is engaging and exciting content; it also states that a television marathon regularly spans an extended period of time. Both definitions agree that a marathon requires the consecutive viewing of more than one episode of the same serialized content.

The number of episodes that constitute a marathon is one of the most controversial points regarding this phenomenon, both in the press (Feeney, 2014) and in academia. Pierce-Grove (2021) argues that BW is related to the desire to complete something. Thus, episodes –regardless of their length– still signal boundaries to the viewer when it comes to deciding whether or not to continue watching a piece of content. Therefore, “the prevalence of the episode in the binge-watching discourse also extends to user behavior. The episode, not the hour, actually seems to be the conceptual unit of the marathon” (Pierce-Grove, 2021, p. 109).

BW has proliferated over the last decade along with the development of streaming platforms that encourage sequential viewing through post-play and skip-intro. Netflix in particular has encouraged this through advertising campaigns and by releasing full seasons of most of its original series (Jenner, 2020).

In extreme cases, a marathon can refer to the consumption of seasons or even entire series in sessions that can last several hours. This has raised concern in disciplines such as medicine, psychology and mass communication due to possible sleep disturbances, sedentary lifestyles and addiction risks, as systematic literature reviews show (Flayelle et al., 2020b; Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). Watching TV marathons is also a practice associated with the young population (Matrix, 2014; Spangler, 2017). College students in particular have expressed a greater interest due to their time availability, familiarity with technology, and desire to follow the cultural trends of the moment.

Several authors have previously explored the factors and consequences of BW. Regarding the conditions that foster this television practice, Petersen (2016) applied 13 qualitative interviews and found that BW is related to socialization. In addition, he reported that some students used it as a reward after completing an assignment. Other conditions that favor this practice are those observed by Panda and Pandey (2017), who found that social interaction, escape from reality, easy access to content, and advertising motivate BW. Asmael (2018) even found that students found BW to be a satisfying activity that made them feel in control, although they also viewed it as an unproductive behavior. Rubenking and colleagues (2018), on the other hand, conducted focus groups and found that students use BW for socializing and coping with college stress. Merrill and Rubenking (2019) applied a survey to explore the factors that predict the frequency and duration of marathon sessions and found that those viewers who enjoy more the content watch longer marathons, while those who use marathons to postpone unpleasant tasks or as a reward complete them more frequently. In addition, Gangadharbatla and colleagues' (2019) mixed-methods study found that the factors that drive BW cravings are related to content, entertainment and the addictive nature of the practice.

Regarding the effects of this television practice, Riddle and colleagues (2018) distinguished that college students engage in intentional and unintentional television marathons, linking the latter to addiction. Vaterlaus and colleagues (2019), using a qualitative content analysis of responses from an online survey, found that the college environment encourages this practice and that participants believe that negative health consequences can occur. Furthermore, students mentioned that while BW is a social activity that allows them to make new friends, it can also promote isolation. Finally, more recently, Anghelcev and

colleagues (2021) found that feelings of immersion in the content were positively related to the duration and frequency of the BW session, in addition to increasing enjoyment of the marathon and building parasocial relationships with the characters in the narrative.

Despite the abundance of international studies on this phenomenon, the lack of empirical research published on this topic in Latin America is striking (Cardoso, 2021; Nascimento & Regis, 2021), especially because two countries in the region (Mexico and Argentina) ranked third worldwide in BW in 2020 (Stoll, 2021). Since most of the studies analyzed so far have been conducted with North American college students, it was proposed to investigate this media consumption practice, at a descriptive level, in this part of the Mexican audience. Therefore, the aim was to investigate the practice of BW among young Mexican university students in order to shed light on the characteristics of this group, the factors that motivate them, as well as their perception of its possible impact on their well-being and academic performance.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The project approach is mixed, with a main qualitative component. Qualitatively, six focus groups were initially conducted, which took place from May 20 to July 3, 2021 and involved 30 students between the ages of 18 and 25. The aim was to maintain proportionality in terms of age, gender and the cycles studied. Participants gave informed consent, which included the recording of the session. Due to the health restrictions in place at the time, these were conducted via videoconference, with sessions lasting between 70 and 90 minutes. Eight triggers were used to collect information about what it means to do TV marathons, what role they play in their daily lives, what kind of content they prefer, the people who accompany them, how they associate BW with their lives as students, how they think about marathons and finally, how they associate this activity with their well-being.

The quantitative phase, conducted through a 50-question online survey (October 20-November 29, 2021), focused on determining the prevalence of the BW practice among students at the university case study and triangulating the qualitative data obtained.

Four types of data were collected: 1) general sociodemographic data (age, gender, undergraduate degree and cycle of study), 2) general binge-watching scale (Viens & Farrar, 2021) translated into Spanish, 3) information on television consumption in

general (preferred times, platforms and devices), and 4) data on the characteristics of BW and the effects it could have on various aspects of their lives.

Sampling was by convenience. We had the support of a public university located in southeastern Mexico to distribute the instrument by e-mail to all undergraduate students, which allowed us to collect 457 responses. The instruments were approved by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee and all respondents were asked to give informed consent.

The main selection criteria were age, gender, level of progress in the degree program and discipline. Economic level and area of residence were not included. The survey was answered mostly by women, younger students and students in the first cycles of university education (table 1).

The distribution of participants by area of study for the focus groups showed a bias towards the Humanities and Social Sciences, while in the survey all areas were present and the highest percentage of responses were equally distributed between Humanities, Medical Sciences and Social Sciences (table 2).

Technique	Genre				Age		Cycle in progress		
	Woman	Men	Binary	Prefers not to say	18-21 years old	22-25 years old	First (1st to 3d)	Medium (4th to 6th)	Final (7th and beyond)
Groups of discussion	53%	47%	0%	0%	50%	50%	33,3%	33,3%	33,3%
Survey	64%	35%	0,4%	0,7%	74%	26%	59%	13%	28%

**Table 1. Conformation of the sample by gender, age and cycle**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

Technique	Disciplinary area				
	Basic sciences	Humanities	Engineering	Medical sciences	Social sciences
Groups of discussion	0%	47%	7%	13%	33%
Survey	9%	28%	13%	28%	23%

**Table 2. Distribution of participants by disciplinary area**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

NVivo 11 software was used to analyze the data from the focus groups and the survey, which facilitated the observation of emerging thematic patterns. Of the quantitative data emanating from the survey, only the frequency distribution is reported here as a percentage. The quotations from the focus groups included in the results are verbatim and are identified with a pseudonym to protect the identity of the informants.

## RESULTS

### Profile of college students who watch marathons

A schematic profile of students engaging in this practice shows that the majority use subscription platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ and Claro Video, which were mentioned by 76.5%. In second place, 43.3% mentioned free streaming sites on the Internet, followed by open or pay TV (37.4%). Marathons are also conducted using files downloaded from the Internet (14.9%) and the most commonly used devices are the smartphone (71.1%), followed by the laptop/desktop computer (54.4%) and SmartTV (43.3%).

It was noted at the outset in the focus groups that watching marathons is a way of spending leisure time, which the survey confirms: 82% of students said they do so on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, and more than half (56%) said they prefer to watch TV series “when they have free time”. Evenings were also a popular option with 31.5% of responses. These results are in line with comments from focus group participants, who also stated that they prefer times when they feel more relaxed, such as evenings, weekends and –most importantly– vacations. The focus groups also showed that the pandemic restrictions changed their schedules. Therefore, the survey asked about changes in television consumption, which was reported by 67%. Overall, 51.4% stated that consumption had increased and 9.6% that it had decreased. Changes in the use of certain devices were also reported, e.g., from traditional television to the use of streaming platforms and greater engagement with news programs.

Series and movie marathons are mainly watched alone, as 74% of respondents stated. Some reasons for this were given in the focus group, such as control over the pace of viewing, the feeling of taking time for themselves and even watching content that they think others would not like.

Nevertheless, 19.5% stated that they watch marathons with family members, which could indicate habits formed during the lockdown. Also due to the restrictions, some participants indicated that they arranged to meet up with



friends or partners to watch content simultaneously via video conferencing or the RAVE Video Party application.

Among the types of content they consider ideal for a marathon, comedy, drama, action, science fiction, romance, fantasy and animation stand out. Many titles of Korean and Turkish drama series were mentioned in the discussion groups, but Japanese animated series (anime) and superhero series also stood out. In this context, all genres can be watched as marathons in the minds of these students, from nature documentaries to reality shows.

It should be noted that the concept of a marathon is flexible for them and has hardly any defined boundaries. The focus group participants applied the term to the consecutive viewing of multiple audiovisual content, from YouTube videos, podcasts and Twitch lives to movie sagas. Some even wondered if the term could be applied to the consumption of other media. This is summarized by the comment of Guillermo, a communication student: "...now that we are addressing the topic of marathons, we are going more into the topic of audiovisual material, the most common ones, right, series and movies? But I would also say we could do a reading marathon...". This broad vision seems to echo the thoughts of Perks (2015), who proposed the term media marathoning for the consumption not only of audiovisual products, but also of literary sagas.

In the minds of these young people, the practice goes beyond the boundaries of the television series. In this sense, for linguistic reasons, it also distances itself from the term binge-watching with its connotation of excessive indulgence; rather, it takes on the connotation of sustained effort, culminating in the completion of a stretch of the sports marathon.

One constant in the focus groups' definition of the marathon is the consecutive viewing of multiple episodes of the same content. In the survey, 59.1% of students indicated that they prefer to watch more than one episode per session, 40.7% one to two episodes per session, 38.7% three to four, 16.6% more than four and only 3.9% indicated more than ten episodes per session. The above data show a panorama in which few of them go into extended marathons, which are the stereotype of this practice. In fact, 43.3% of respondents said that they spend more than an hour per session watching content, but it is not known what the upper limit is due to the different length of episodes in genres such as animation, comedy or drama.

It has been confirmed that long marathons are only watched when the content is extremely attractive. In general, this applies to fictional programs that can, in the words of the participants, "captivate" viewers or keep them "hooked" with an

exciting plot that motivates them to keep watching until the mystery is solved. However, these would be exceptional cases. In everyday life, it is more common for this viewer profile to watch episodes in their free time during the school week or to watch several episodes on weekends or during vacations. There were even participants who explained in detail how they organized their schedule in order to continue watching their series, sometimes interspersing episodes in their free time between classes, getting up early to continue watching a long series, or simply watching it in the background while doing homework or other activities at home. There are supporters and opponents of BW among these young people. However, it is noticeable that they all assume that the content is available to them whenever they want to watch it, and that they can choose in what order and at what pace they want to watch it. Jenner (2021) has argued that the history of this practice is characterized by viewers gradually gaining greater control over the consumption of content on their own terms. It seems that this sense of total control over content is an essential feature of the present moment, going beyond the ability to watch one episode at a time and giving rise to all kinds of personalized consumption practices.

#### Reasons to watch marathons

In general, students see BW as a positive thing. Reasons include distraction from stressful situations, thinking about something other than school, awakening the imagination, sharing emotions with other people, and even coping with difficult moments. In the focus groups, they said that they primarily do TV marathons to forget about the problems and pressures of college. For them, a marathon would be a moment of relaxation amidst the demands of school, work and personal life, so they use phrases like: "escape valve", "stress relief" and even "refuge".

Javier, a medical student, told us that his last memorable marathons were *Invincible* (Amazon Prime Video, 2021-) and *The Boys* (Amazon Prime Video, 2019-): "Those were series that, in truth, were worthwhile and that for me are more of a distraction, a kind of escape from my daily life, from what I see at work".

This notion of escape emerged right at the beginning of the fieldwork, when in one of the two pilot focus groups the idea that television had helped them cope with emotional difficulties during the pandemic became apparent. Tony, a communications student, shared, "I would say that watching series is a method of distraction or entertainment for me that I use frequently, and even more so during this pandemic season. ... Even when I'm feeling unwell or when I'm sad or feeling down. ... It's just a time when I can distract myself, enjoy something good and give myself a little time". In this context, Perks (2015) posited the idea that the marathon becomes a personal time of relaxation in the midst of routine,

proposing the term floating holiday as the individual decides that in this moment, the rules of everyday life do not apply, instead devoting his/her full attention to the series, movie or book of their choice.

The same author was one of the first to state that marathons can be used to provide respite during times of convalescence (Perks, 2015) or difficult emotional situations. In this regard, one of the participants, who reported being diagnosed with depression, stated that watching marathons of his favorite comedy series *The Office* (NBC, 2005-2013) served as antidepressant for him, as he stated, while another said that this practice helped him to overcome the situation after a serious car accident. For her part, Keyla, a management student, said that watching shows helped her get over a breakup:

I mean, I watched the whole season of *Friends* [NBC, 1994-2004] and RuPaul's *Drag Race* [Logo TV, 2009-] and yeah, I think that helped me a lot... all my energy was focused on watching shows. It was a vacation, so I made the most of it and it got me out of the hole... I mean, there was no psychologist, there was nothing, because there were no options at the time. And it was a great distraction that really helped me a lot.

This type of statement came up repeatedly in the focus groups, so it was decided to include it as a specific question in the survey. 63.2% of respondents said that watching TV marathons had helped them to overcome a difficult emotional period.

A second motive identified was the desire to socialize. This may come as a surprise as the vast majority of respondents said they watched marathons alone. However, several authors agree that there is always a social component, even when doing them alone (Perks, 2015; Rubenking & Bracken, 2020). While watching a series, opinions are exchanged, both on social networks and in face-to-face conversations with friends, colleagues and family. After finishing a title, recommendations are passed on to others and recommendations are asked for. The latter happened spontaneously in the focus groups, as participants gained confidence when they realized they were in the presence of other series fans, so they were soon encouraged to make and ask for recommendations.

It should be noted that the lockdown imposed by the pandemic also made this pastime more acceptable within the nuclear family, as it presented itself as an opportunity to spend time together and share the domestic space. Several of the students reported watching marathons of comic series such as *Vecinos* (Televisa, 2005 -) or *Club de Cuervos* (Netflix, 2015-2019) with their families. Testimonies were also collected from some female students who watched Korean dramas with their mothers and sisters.

The third prominent motivation was the need to keep up with what is popular, known as fear of missing out or FoMo. Although these viewers exercise a high degree of control in choosing the content they like, the times they consume it and the company, they recognized that they sometimes get carried away by trends, especially when many publications about a series appear on social networks. They then go to extraordinary lengths to find out what everyone is talking about and join the conversation. Often this means that they have to quickly familiarize themselves with the available episodes. For example, the survey reflected the unexpected popularity of *Squid Game* (Netflix, 2021), a title that was mentioned a lot, probably because its premiere coincided with the date of application of the instrument.

A final motivation that emerged in the focus groups was the feeling of having completed something, as finishing watching a series can be understood as a kind of achievement that provides satisfaction. This motivation seemed to be confirmed in the survey, with 91.2% stating that they almost always or always felt satisfied when they had finished a TV marathon. Similarly, 54.5% said that they almost always or always felt proud when they finished it.

It also became clear that they value watching TV content because they learn new things, see the customs of other cultures represented and even learn more about their profession. For example, aspiring doctors watch shows like *House, M.D.* (Fox, 2004-2012) and *The Good Doctor* (ABC, 2017-), while lawyers-in-training are drawn to justice and crime shows or shows depicting moral dilemmas. Communication students are avid consumers, as this is how they learn audiovisual production. Future language graduates emphasized that the series allow them to acquire vocabulary from the languages they are studying, although students from other disciplines also appreciated the opportunity to familiarize themselves with English, Japanese, Korean, or Chinese.

#### **Time management, school and marathons**

The students were able to recognize both positive and negative aspects of BW. They agree that the impact of this practice on their daily lives is limited. For example, they use it for relaxation, but they are clear that it should not take precedence over their commitments at any time. In both the discussion groups and the survey, there were reflections that called for people to measure themselves against this practice. For example, Laura, an environmental engineering student, commented as follows: "I mean, there's time for everything, but sometimes we overdo it in these marathons. So, it's like, this comes into my mind and I kind of take a break and get on with other things, and then I keep going".

The focus groups revealed that the wide range of television content is perceived as a temptation, a kind of time management risk. Keyla, a management student, for example, said that she had to temporarily cancel her Netflix subscription:

Right now, for example, I know I don't have enough willpower to wait [for the weekend]. So I've paused the membership, because otherwise I'm stuck there. So until July, we're not going to renew it, and I'm going to finish the show I was watching, the show *¿Quién mató a Sara?* (Netflix, 2021-2022). Maybe my sister will [say], 'Hey, pay, pay, I want to watch *Élite* (Netflix, 2018-)'. But well, no, I know me. So, no.

As it can be seen, students try to maintain control by limiting BW to vacations, weekends and free time after completing academic obligations. Jaime, a law student, hierarchizes: "First comes school and important assignments. Everything comes first before I watch a movie or series because, later the movie people don't come out and help me with school. No, right?"

Some of the students admitted that watching marathons sometimes interfered with their time management. However, only a few participants said that they exceptionally watched series while following online courses. Mario, a communication student, did so because a new season of his favorite series (*Élite*) had just been released and he wanted to watch it immediately to avoid spoilers that were already surfacing on social media:

Really, if I have a series in my head... I have to see it the day it comes out, also because later on Facebook, on Instagram, they spoil everything. Sometimes I don't pay that much attention to class. What I do is I watch the show on my laptop and the class on my phone. And I'm here, an ear here and so on, half-way through... with the *Élite* series, I wasn't paying attention to the class that day... I said, 'No, I have to watch it'... Besides, there are eight episodes, so I could easily watch it in one day. So yes, I made those exceptions and didn't pay attention in school.

The conditions at the time, which allowed the courses to be completed online with the camera off, would have made it easier to watch them simultaneously on another device. But, as Mario said, these are exceptional circumstances.

In the survey, a total of 77.2% said that watching marathons never or almost never interfered with their schoolwork. Similarly, 39.4% of respondents said they have never put off their schoolwork to keep watching TV, while 46.8% said they

have almost never done so, 11.6% said they have almost always done so, and only 2.2% said they always do so. These findings are consistent with those of the focus groups, which showed that the vast majority of students have the BW habit mostly under control, with some possible neglect.

### Physical and emotional shades of grey of marathons

In the literature on BW, there are concerns about the physical and emotional effects this practice could cause (Gangadharbatla et al., 2019; Petersen, 2016; Riddle et al., 2018; Vaterlaus et al., 2019). Against this background, the perceptions of university students were examined. In the focus groups, the effects of TV marathons on fitness were clearly highlighted. These included sedentariness, headaches, sleep disorders, muscle pain and vision problems.

The experience of Sebastián, a language student, may be illustrative:

I remember watching a series called *She-Ra (She-Ra and the Princesses of Power)*, Netflix, 2018-2020). It had three or four seasons, each with ten episodes... And I decided to watch it on my phone and it got to a point where my eyes were already tired. And I said, 'I'm going to switch to TV. It's not the same, it won't hurt me as much'. And it turned out to be the same, because my eyes still hurt. That stuck in my mind because my vision problem started from there, because I didn't take my eyes off.

Although several participants in the focus groups had similar experiences, only 5.7% in the survey indicated that they had experienced physical problems as a result of BW, including migraines, headaches, eye pain, lack of sleep and stomach problems due to junk food.

On the other hand, the most obvious emotional impact of watching marathons was nostalgia at the end of a series. Overall, 68.3% of respondents said they felt nostalgic almost every time they finished a marathon. This feeling of malaise afterwards is referred to in the literature as show hole (Flayelle et al., 2020b) or post-binge malaise (Jones et al., 2018) and it was expressed by participants reporting that they felt a void and did not know what else to do or watch after a series had ended. The comment from Paola, a public accounting student, describes this feeling clearly:

Then I finish a series and I'm left with an existential void and I say, 'How am I going to get on with my life now?' And it's like: 'Now it's over! What's next? What can I do?' I end up in groups talking about the show, sharing things about the show and so on. In the end, I'm really stuck.



Several other participants stated that they fight this feeling of nostalgia by researching more about the series, seeking opinions from other fans, participating in debates, viewing fanart or reading fanfiction. As Perks (2015) previously noted, a marathon can be an entry point into a fandom due to its intensity and immersion, and can serve as a preparatory experience for integration into the subculture that has grown up around some narratives.

Some focus group participants expressed feelings of guilt for spending so much time watching audiovisual content:

When I've been tied to the computer for a certain amount of time, I say: 'Come on, Lau, you've been tied to the laptop for four hours!' My eyes are burning. No, no, no. I feel like I'm wasting my life doing this... when I'm old and people ask me, 'What were you doing at this age? No, I've spent most of my life watching TV series'. I feel like there are so many things to do and I'm wasting so much of it (Laura).

Surprisingly, this perception seemed to be reversed in the survey, with a total of 87.5% of respondents stating that they almost never or never feel guilty when they finish a marathon. This discrepancy could also be due to the characteristics of the data collection techniques, which needs to be investigated further.

One of the triggers for the focus group was being asked to recount a memorable marathon. This led to spontaneous statements where a temporary lack of control was noticeable as they found it difficult to stop watching one episode after another. The account of Pablo, a language student who had a steady job alongside his studies, may be clear in this regard:

I, well, I have college during the week and I have to work at the weekend, so it's a combination of the two. I pick one or two episodes of a series and if the episodes have really hooked me, I don't watch one or two, I watch 10, 12 and I'm very tired the next day, but it was worth it because I've soaked up the information from the series I'm watching. But it's also happened to me that I've been very tired at the end because I've said to myself 'just one or two episodes before bed' and I've ended up watching half a season.

Another insightful quote about dealing with control when watching marathons comes from Norma, a medical student comparing whether she watches alone or with company, "When I watch them with company, sometimes I have a handbrake because the other person tells me, 'No, well, I'm already tired, or up to here, or there's no more episodes, right, but up to next week'. But when I watch them alone, I don't have a handbrake, just my conscience, and that fails me sometimes".

The above excerpt illustrates that BW is a habit that they see as extremely positive, but at the same time a temptation that can sometimes get out of control. However, from the impressions shared in both the focus groups and the survey, it appears that for the vast majority of participants this habit is not so frequent or severe as to have serious consequences in their academic or personal lives.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Among the existing studies on BW, those of a qualitative nature have a greater affinity with the results obtained (Perks, 2015; Petersen, 2016; Rubenking et al., 2018; Vaterlaus et al., 2019), as they describe the characteristics of this practice in a specific context and also ask about the meanings attributed to it by the members of the group studied. Even if empirical observations cannot be generalized to all viewer profiles, they provide sound insights and give clues in the search of the reasons behind certain habits.

In this study, impressions and opinions were collected from young Mexicans who, due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, completed their university studies remotely and were connected to their professors and fellow students via a computer platform. It is therefore to be expected that their BW experiences were shaped by these exceptional circumstances. With this in mind, it is not surprising that watching marathons was so often seen as a coping strategy that allowed them to escape the emotional pressures they were experiencing at the time, as it has also been documented in studies conducted in other regions at the same time (Arend et al., 2021; Boursier et al., 2021; Dixit et al., 2020).

It is noticeable that all participants assumed that they had easy access to the content and could watch it at their own pace. It is confirmed that their idea of marathon includes the two defining characteristics: continuity of content and viewer autonomy (Merikivi et al., 2020). Likewise, a temporal component could be identified, as these adolescents consider that it must be a session lasting several hours to be considered a marathon, which is in line with the observation of Rubenking and Bracken (2020), for whom a complete definition of this practice must take into account a long period of consumption as well as content that is generally narrative, dramatic and suspenseful.

In terms of motivations for BW, participants agreed that they do it to relax, forget everyday problems, socialize (in person and remotely), and learn new things. Although it was not used as an instrument in the data collection, it is noteworthy that the motives found are consistent with the model proposed in the *Watching TV Series Motives Questionnaire* (WTSMQ) scale, which includes four factors: social



(interest in relating to others through the series), emotional enhancement (watching to experience intense affective states), enrichment (developing intellectual experiences and acquiring knowledge), and coping/assurance (avoiding thinking about real-life problems or coping with negative feelings) (Flayelle et al., 2020a).

The study also found testimonies that seem to confirm Pittman and Steiner's (2021) categorization of social and planned binge-watching, which they refer to as feast-watching, and unplanned and compulsive binge-watching, which they refer to as cringe-watching. In Spanish, these terms allude to a festive marathon, as opposed to one that is embarrassing. Although they do not use the same terms, Flayelle and colleagues (2020b) also invite us to consider the complexity of the BW phenomenon as a gratifying viewing experience as well as excessive and problematic behavior related to dysfunctional use of technology.

Apparently, most of the participants in this study opted for the first type of BW, which was solitary but had a social component activated by sharing opinions or recommendations with peers or family members, in person or through social networks.

There was also some testimony from individuals who said that at some point they had trouble controlling the urge to watch episode after episode. They said this was due to the nature of the content, as many current series are designed to encourage this urge. Sometimes the rush to finish the content is increased by the desire to join in the conversations about the titles that are creating euphoria and avoid the spoilers that flood social media after the premieres.

Another interesting insight is how the professions they study frame what they watch and how they acquire it. This is perhaps because their vocation plays a fundamental role at this moment in their lives. Similarly, participants noted that watching series can teach them useful things, from languages to meditation techniques to understanding different cultures. The insistence on this aspect could also be interpreted as a justification for a pastime that is not highly valued socially. It is therefore not surprising that they sometimes report feelings of guilt and a sense of doing something unproductive with their time.

The consensus that emerged in the focus groups, as well as the data collected in the survey, shows that the majority see marathons as a useful leisure activity that they keep under control by limiting them to weekends or vacations. They are aware of the health risks marathons can cause, but state that the impact on their wellbeing is limited. Similarly, only a minority of participants indicated that they occasionally neglected their schoolwork because they watched marathons.

Although much of the literature on BW falls under the quantitative approach, this study confirms the usefulness of mixed approaches to gain a more holistic view of this media consumption practice.

The popularization of BW has been accompanied by the proliferation of streaming platforms that provide the technical means to watch episode after episode and also offer a vast catalog of titles. However, this is not the only way to access content, which can also be obtained via illegal websites or downloads circulating on USB sticks or hard disks.

One limitation of the study is that all the participants attended a single institution. Therefore, further studies should expand the geographic coverage and also consider the socioeconomic level of the participants to determine possible differences in the practice of television marathons.

Undoubtedly, BW takes on different nuances with different audience profiles, depending on the conditions of technological access, level of digital literacy, taste for certain genres and desire to be up to date with the latest titles. In the case of Mexican university students, it can be seen that consuming audiovisual content in the form of a marathon is a common practice among their age group, which serves them to socialize, learn job-related things and even manage their emotional state by using it as an "escape valve" in difficult personal moments, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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