

DENİZ YAVUZ

UNDERSTANDING LETTERBOXD USERS

Bilkent University 2024

UNDERSTANDING LETTERBOXD USERS:
THE PLATFORM'S INFLUENCE ON FILM
CONSUMPTION AND CINEPHILIA IN THE
DIGITAL AGE

A Master's Thesis

by
DENİZ YAVUZ

Department of
Communication and Design
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University Ankara
November 2024

To *dad*



UNDERSTANDING LETTERBOXD USERS: THE PLATFORM'S INFLUENCE ON FILM
CONSUMPTION AND CINEPHILIA IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

DENİZ YAVUZ

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN MEDIA AND VISUAL STUDIES

THE DEPARTMENT OF
COMMUNICATION AND DESIGN
İHSAN DOĞRAMACI BİLKENT UNIVERSITY
ANKARA

November 2024

UNDERSTANDING LETTERBOXD USERS: THE PLATFORM’S INFLUENCE ON
FILM CONSUMPTION AND CINEPHILIA IN THE DIGITAL AGE

By Deniz Yavuz

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies.

Emel Özdora
Advisor

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies.

Colleen Bevin Kennedy-Karpat
Examining Committee Member

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies.

İpek Azime Çelik Rappas
Examining Committee Member

Approval of the Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences

Refet S. Gürkaynak
Director

ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING LETTERBOXD USERS: THE PLATFORM'S INFLUENCE ON FILM CONSUMPTION AND CINEPHILIA IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Yavuz, Deniz

M.A. in Media and Visual Studies

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Emel Özdora

November 2024

Letterboxd is an online platform that is becoming more and more popular among film enthusiasts. It serves as a space where users engage in film-related activities such as creating their individualized film diaries, giving ratings, writing reviews, and creating their personal watching lists. This study explores the complex field of user psychology in the context of Letterboxd, analyzing the platform's notable impact on users' film-watching habits, the influence of other users' opinions on what people think, and the platform's contribution to the transformation of cinephilia in the digital age. Using quantitative and qualitative methodology, the research employs survey data enhanced with open-ended questions to capture the complex nature of user participation. The goal of the study is to determine how Letterboxd affects users' habits of film consumption by investigating how the platform creates a sense of community among its users, shapes their preferences and viewing decisions, and influences their own opinions regarding films. Furthermore, it aims to unravel the role of Letterboxd in the evolution of a new understanding of cinephilia in the digital age. Ultimately, the research illuminates the changing landscape of cinema

appreciation by deconstructing the dynamics of spectatorship habits, the impact of other people's thoughts on forming people's opinions, and the ever-evolving nature of cinephilia.

Keywords: Cinephilia, Letterboxd, Need to Belong, User Psychology, Watching Habits



ÖZET

LETTERBOXD KULLANICILARINI ANLAMAK: PLATFORMUN FİLM TÜKETİMİ ALIŞKANLIKLARI VE DİJİTAL ÇAĞDA SİNEFİLİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

Yavuz, Deniz

Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Emel Özdora

Kasım 2024

Letterboxd, film meraklıları arasında giderek daha popüler hale gelen bir çevrimiçi platformdur. Platform, kullanıcıların kendi film günlüklerini oluşturma, filmleri puanlama, eleştiri yazma, ve kendi kişisel izleme listelerini oluşturma gibi faaliyetlerde bulundukları dijital bir alan olarak hizmet vermektedir. Bu yüksek lisans tezi, kullanıcı psikolojisinin karmaşık yapısını Letterboxd bağlamında araştırmıştır. Platformun kullanıcıların film izleme alışkanlıkları üzerindeki kayda değer etkisini, diğer kullanıcıların görüşlerinin insanların kendi fikir oluşumları üzerindeki etkisini ve platformun sinefilinin dijital çağdaki dönüşümüne nasıl katkı sağladığını analiz etmiştir. Nicel ve nitel metodolojileri kullanan bu araştırma, kullanıcı katılımının karmaşık doğasını yakalamak için açık uçlu sorularla geliştirilmiş nicel ve nitel anketler kullanır. Çalışmanın amacı, bu platformun kullanıcılar arasında topluluk hissiyatı yaratma, tercihlerini ve seyir kararlarını şekillendirme, ve filmlere ilişkin kendi görüşlerini etkileme yollarını inceleyerek Letterboxd kullanıcılarının film tüketim alışkanlıklarının nasıl etkilendiğini

belirlemektir. Ayrıca dijital çağda yeni bir sinefillik anlayışının ortaya çıkmasında Letterboxd'ın rolünün ortaya çıkarılması amaçlanmaktadır. Sonuç olarak bu araştırma, film izleme alışkanlıklarının dinamiklerini, diğer kullanıcıların düşüncelerinin insanların fikirlerinin oluşumu üzerindeki etkisini, ve sinefilinin değişen doğasını çözümleyerek dijital çağda sinema beğenisinin değişmekte olan durumunu aydınlatmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aidiyet İhtiyacı, İzleme Alışkanlıkları, Kullanıcı Psikolojisi, Letterboxd, Sinefili



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like express my heartfelt gratitude to my thesis advisor, Assoc. Prof. Emel Özdora. Her patience and guidance throughout this journey have been invaluable. Beyond her role as an advisor, she has been a source of endless support and understanding, particularly during the challenging moments in my personal life. Her sincere mentorship and compassionate approach have left a lasting impact on me, and for that, I am deeply thankful.

I would also like to thank my thesis committee members, Assoc. Prof. Colleen Kennedy-Karpat and Assoc. Prof. İpek Azime Çelik Rappas, for their invaluable feedback. Their insightful suggestions and constructive criticism have greatly enhanced the quality of my thesis, helping to shape this research into a more comprehensive and well-rounded study.

I am deeply grateful for my aunt, Yeşim Devrim Yıldız, for everything she has done for me. Her unwavering support and motherly love have been a cornerstone of my journey, and I wouldn't be where I am today without her belief in me. She has always encouraged me to strive for my best while understanding when I needed space, a balance for which I am incredibly thankful. Words cannot fully capture how much I appreciate having her in my life, and I will always be grateful for her presence and guidance.

I would also like to thank my dearest friend, Can Şahman, for being not just the best friend but the truest life companion I could ever ask for. He has been my rock, my constant source of mental and emotional support, always there to lift me up during moments of doubt and hopelessness. In my darkest moments, his shining presence and endless belief in me helped me regain my confidence when I needed it most. Our countless “therapy sessions” under the

blankets on my couch were lifelines, filled with love, care, and understanding that only a soul as special as his could provide. I am endlessly grateful to have a lifetime friend like him by my side. He has been my greatest source of comfort, not only during this thesis journey but throughout my life. I cherish him more than words can express.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my dear friends Ada Beliz Özduran, Mehmet Kızıklı, and Sena Begüm Giray. Their friendship has been a beacon of love and support in my life, and their endless belief in me has been a source of strength throughout this journey. They have stood by me through every challenge, offering laughter, comfort, and encouragement when I needed it most. Their presence has turned what could have been an overwhelming experience into one filled with warmth and reassurance. I am endlessly grateful for their love, and I feel incredibly lucky to have them in my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	vi
ÖZET.....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	x
TABLE OF CONTENTS	xii
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xv
 CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	 1
1.1. Structure and Organization	10
 CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW..	 13
2.1. Theoretical Framework.....	13
2.2. Sharing Behavior and Identity Construction on Social Media.....	18
2.3. Shaping Film Watching Practices.....	22
2.4. The Influence of Others' Opinions on Opinion Formation	28
2.5. The Transformation of Cinephilia in the Digital Age	34
 CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	 38
3.1. Introduction.....	38
3.2. Design	38
3.3. Survey Question Development	42
3.4. Use of Surveys for Media Psychology Research.....	52
3.5. Data Collection and Survey Sample	53
 CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS.....	 56

4.1. Changing Viewing Experience and Motivations of Letterboxd Users	56
4.2. Do Other People’s Opinions Actually Matter?.....	63
4.3. A New Understanding of Cinephilia in the Digital Age.....	69
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	80
5.1. Key Findings of the Study	81
5.1.1. Changing Film Watching Habits and Motivations.....	81
5.1.2. The Influence of Others’ Opinions on What Letterboxd Users Think About Films.....	82
5.1.3. What Letterboxd Means for Cinephile Culture in the Digital Age	84
5.2. Theoretical Implications and Comparison with Literature	86
5.3. Limitations of the Study	92
5.4. Concluding Remarks	94
REFERENCES.....	96
APPENDICES	103
Appendix A. Bilkent University Ethics Committee Approval	104
Appendix B. Informed Consent.....	105
Appendix C. Survey Questions.....	107

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Gender Statistics.....	39
Table 2. Age Statistics.....	40
Table 3. Survey Statements for Changing Viewing Practices.....	41
Table 4. Survey Statements for the Influence of Others' Opinions.....	41
Table 5. Survey Statements for the Transformation of Cinephilia in the Digital Age.....	42

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1. The Homepage of Letterboxd	3
Fig. 2. Layout of a Letterboxd User's Profile	4
Fig.3. "Popular Reviews with Friends" Section on Letterboxd	4
Fig.4. "New From Friends" and "Popular Lists" Section on Letterboxd.....	5
Fig. 5. A Screenshot of a Tweet on Twitter (now called X).	44
Fig. 6. A Screenshot of a TikTok Post on TikTok.....	44
Fig. 7. A Screenshot of a Tweet on Twitter (now called X)	45
Fig. 8. A Screenshot of a TikTok Post on TikTok.....	46
Fig. 9. A Screenshot of a TikTok Post	47
Fig. 10. A Screenshot of a Tweet on Twitter (now called X)	50
Fig. 11. A Screenshot of a Tweet on Twitter (now called X).	50
Fig. 12. A Screenshot of a Tweet on Twitter (now called X)	51
Fig. 13. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: "I feel that the way I watch films has changed since I started using Letterboxd.".....	57
Fig. 14. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: "I think about how I will rate a film as I am watching the film."	59
Fig. 15. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: "I think about what review I will write about a film as I am watching the film."	60

Fig. 16. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “If I hadn’t used Letterboxd, I doubt I would have watched as many films as I do today.”	62
Fig. 17. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I find myself watching films just for the sake of logging them on my Letterboxd diary.”	63
Fig. 18. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I feel the impact of other users’ ratings while rating a film.”	65
Fig. 19. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I feel that I am not being completely honest while rating a film.”	66
Fig. 20. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I think about what other users will think about me after seeing a rating/review I gave/wrote for a film.”	68
Fig. 21. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I find myself needing to belong to a certain cinephile community while using Letterboxd.”	69
Fig. 22. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I feel that I will be judged by other users because of a rating/review I give/write for a film.”	71
Fig. 23. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their favorite films section.”	73
Fig. 24. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their opinions on a certain film.”	75
Fig. 25. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I find myself competing with certain users in terms of how many films I’ve watched compared to them.”	76
Fig. 26. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “After I’ve watched a film, I read about what other users on the platform wrote about that film.”	78
Fig. 27. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I think that Letterboxd offers a variety of perspectives regarding people’s reviews and criticisms about films.”	79
Fig. 28. A Screenshot of an Instagram post by [at]letterboxd, during an interview with Monica Bellucci about her four favorite films.....	89

Fig. 29. A Screenshot of an Instagram post by [at]letterboxd, asking random people
on the streets about their four favorite films. 89





CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The influence of social media platforms on our daily lives is now undoubtedly significant. Regardless of what these platforms are of service to, the users of these platforms are comprehensively affected by their regular use of social media, either positively or negatively. These platforms take up a notable space in our everyday lives; some become a part of our daily routine as each is a unique digital space that can connect us to other people and the world around us in general. In this context, it is fair to say that Letterboxd found itself a place among these platforms, despite the fact that it only serves a particular audience, the community of cinephiles. As Behlil (2005) states, “The classic cinephile, as the term was adopted in the 1960s, connected the love of cinema to the actual medium of film, and to the movie-going experience” (p.112). Now that the times have changed, the definition of “cinephilia,” and thus of “cinephile,” has inevitably expanded and started to include online cinephile communities and platforms under its roof. In addition to this, the experience of going to movie theaters has lost ground to home-based movie experience, due to the rising popularity of online streaming platforms. The word “cinephilia” has attributed a significant amount of meaning to the experience of watching movies at the movie theatres. In the pre-digital age, the cinephiles did not have the chance to watch films whenever they wanted, or to own copies of the films that they liked. As the only way of experiencing cinema was the movie theaters, people have felt the need for a

community that is filled with people who share their love and passion for films as they do. The formation of the cinephile community was directly related to people's need to share opinions, ideas, meet like-minded people, and thus, keeping this tradition which has turned into a participatory culture alive. In the digital age, however, this need for socialization in cinephile communities left its place to digital platforms. Nowadays, "just as it is easier to obtain films and access journals, it is also easier to meet fellow cinephiles on the internet" (Behlil, 2005, p.113). In 2005, people used to meet like-minded film enthusiasts through chat groups and film forums. In this day and age, they continue this cinephile tradition through Letterboxd, which serves as a digital substitution of the term "cinephile community."

Letterboxd is an online platform for film enthusiasts, offering its users the options to log, rate, review the films they watch, and eventually share their tastes in film with others. It was co-founded in 2011 by Matthew Buchanan and Karl von Randow (Letterboxd, 2021) and is still active to this day. The platform functions as both a journal for its users with the diary option, which allows its users to track the films they watch and log it into an online diary, and a social network for like-minded cinephiles to connect with each other based on their tastes in cinema. Users customize online profiles which shows their favorite films, their watching activity, and their customized, user-generated lists. It also works as a database where one can find the relevant information about each film, regarding their cast and crew information, synopses, and whether they are accessible through online streaming platforms. The platform enables its users to follow other users, comment on each others' reviews, like each others' content, and so on. In terms of its limited audience, it differs from the popular social media platforms like Instagram or Twitter, as it is a platform that only serves its sole purpose, which is to channel cinephilia and create an online roof where cinephiles can meet under. The platform has its own sections for people to discover

more films, such as “Popular this week,” “Popular with friends,” “Top-rated films on the platform,” and so on. Ultimately, Letterboxd’s structure encourages self-expression for its users through their taste in film, while also allowing interaction with a global audience of cinephiles. It plays a significant role in shaping contemporary film consumption habits and the presentation of online cinephile identities.

Figure 1. The Homepage of Letterboxd

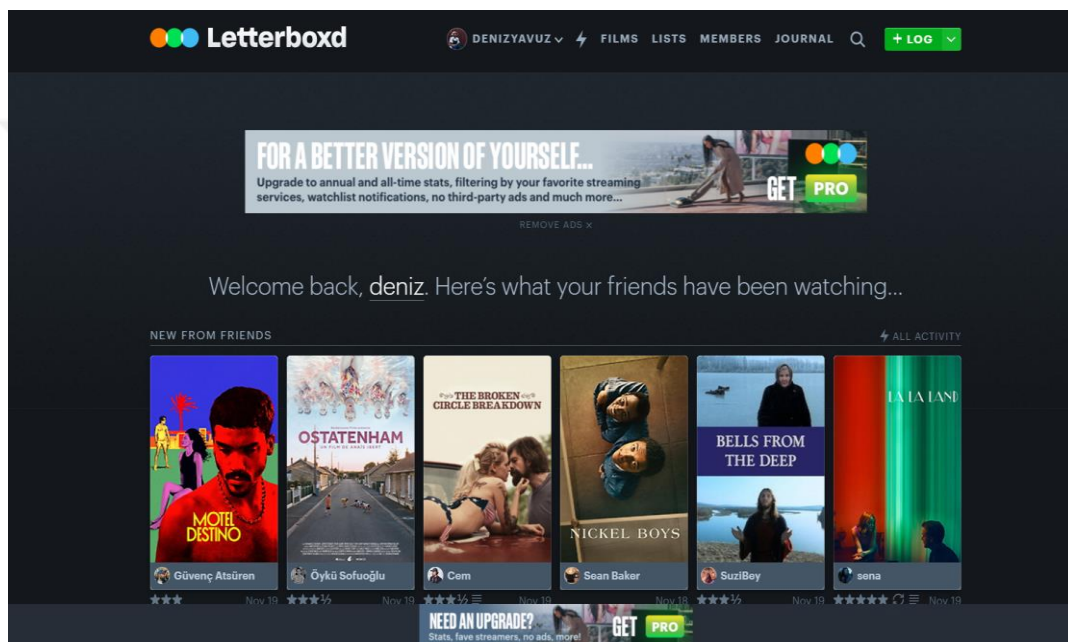


Figure 2. Layout of a Letterboxd User's Profile

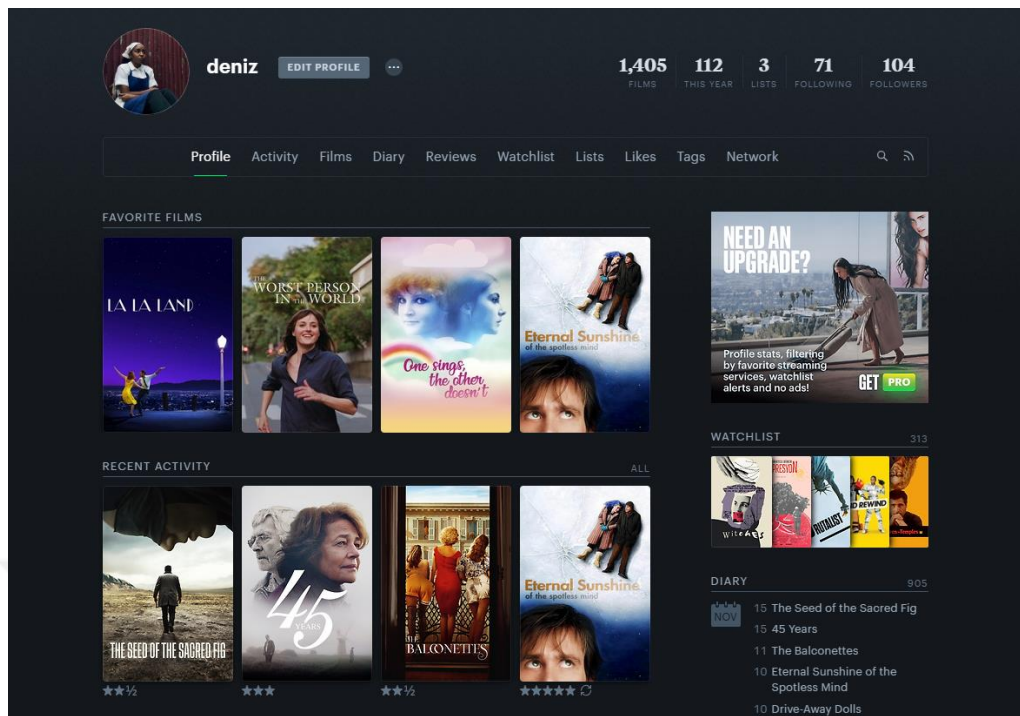


Figure 3. “Popular Reviews with Friends” Section on Letterboxd

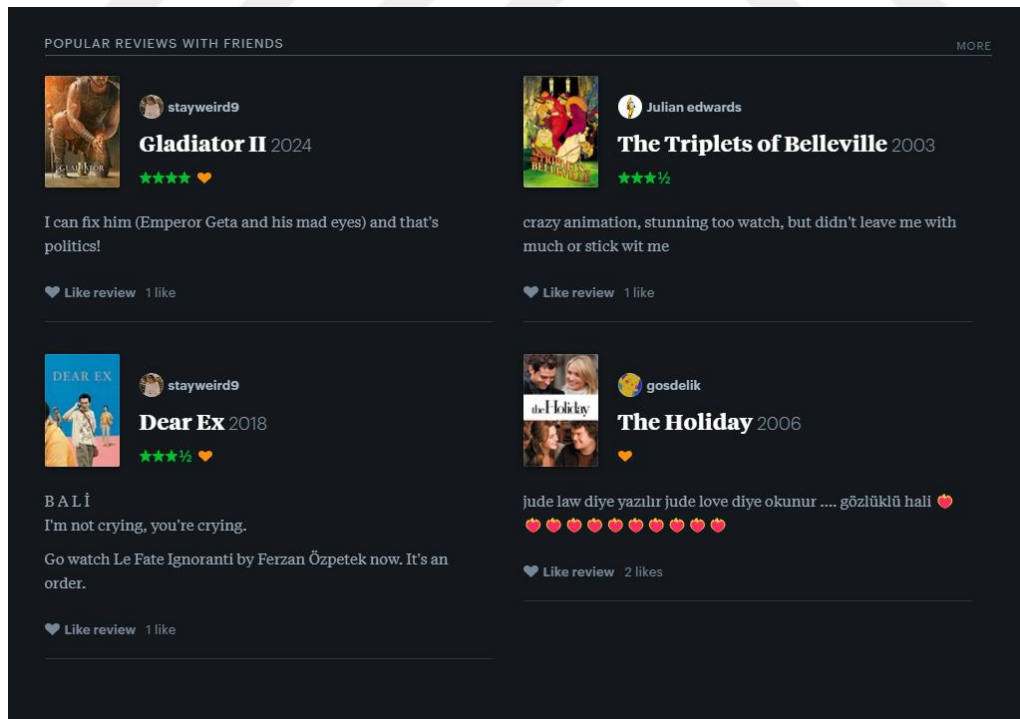
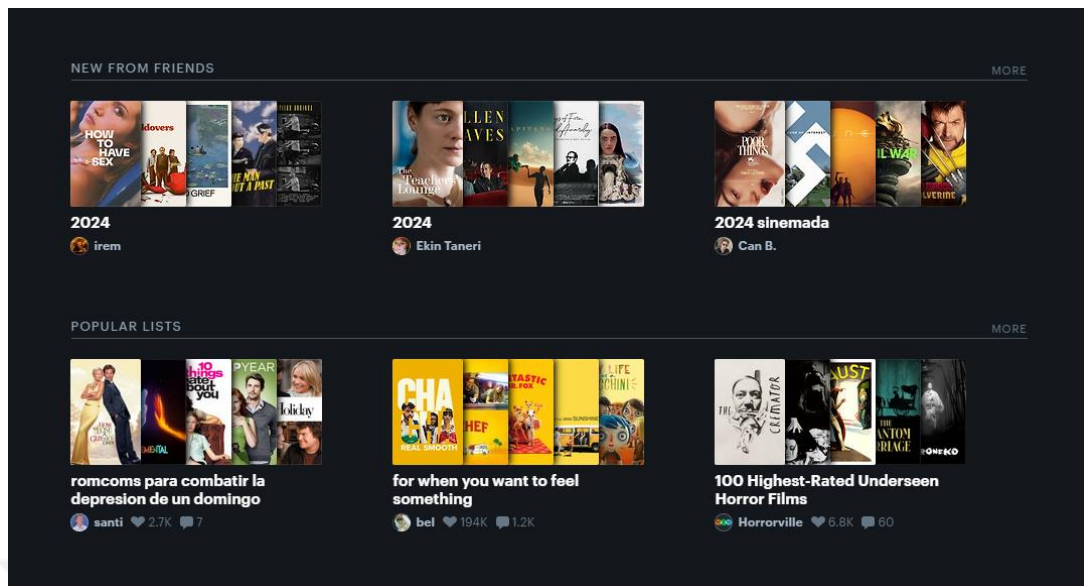


Figure 4. “New From Friends” and “Popular Lists” Sections on Letterboxd



Letterboxd is not the only platform that comes to mind when considering platforms created explicitly for film enthusiasts. Before the emergence of Letterboxd, most cinephiles were engaged in IMDb (Internet Movie Database), and some still are. However, when the question “What does Letterboxd have to offer different than IMDb?” is posed, it is rational to claim that these two platforms serve different purposes, even though they have similar sides to them as well. While the more well-known platform IMDb primarily provides industry-based information and trivia, Letterboxd offers more of a personal, community-based, and social-media-like approach to film enthusiasts. IMDb, too, has the option of rating and reviewing films, indeed. However, unlike Letterboxd, it is not solely concerned with the users’ opinions and does not necessarily offer any community interaction. IMDb serves as more of a database, focusing on the industry-related information. Letterboxd, on the other hand, has more of a social media-like approach that focuses on film diaries and the personal opinions of its users so that like-minded users can interact with each other at the same time.

Over the last couple of years, Letterboxd turned into a social media platform where people

connect with each other through their tastes, ratings, reviews, and the profiles they set up to represent themselves online, either officially or anonymously. Even though the actual purpose of the platform was to be a film-cataloging application, Letterboxd's situation took a different turn, and it became much more than an online film-logging platform. Nowadays, Letterboxd appears in almost every film-related event in the US and the most well-known film festivals around the world, interviewing people from the industry and asking them about their "four favorite films," which increases the popularity of the platform day by day. According to research (Letterboxd, 2021), the platform currently has more than 14 million users worldwide as of June 2024.

What Letterboxd offers to its users has changed many habits of the cinephile community, including how they experience the films they watch and how they feel about stating their thoughts regarding the films they watch. Through the use of Letterboxd, considered the most well-known platform for cinephiles to interact, the understanding of cinephilia has undoubtedly transformed in the digital age. I am confident in making this statement because I have had the chance to observe people around me who use Letterboxd, including myself, throughout the years I have been using the platform. Besides, as an active social media user, I constantly run into different kinds of social media content around several platforms, such as TikTok and Twitter, regarding how using Letterboxd changed many aspects for its users.

Although media psychology is quite an active and operational field in communication studies, and there is substantial research on user psychology in various social media platforms, there is yet room for research regarding Letterboxd and its psychological aspects. It is essential to understand what kind of a change Letterboxd asserts in the viewing experience of its users since it is the first interactive platform in the digital age

where the cinephile community can engage with each other under an online roof. I am particularly interested in exploring how this platform influences the cinephile community's viewing practices and contributes to the new understanding of cinephilia in the age of technology. I believe these findings can also foreshadow how future generations will be consuming audiovisual material in a more evolved, post-digital age, and how they will channel and transform cinephilia in the upcoming years.

Entering the digital age has undoubtedly changed several aspects of the consumption of every kind of audiovisual material. Starting from the moment when using multiple screens was possible during a viewing experience, the intersection of technology and film consumption started to show its influence on consumers. Although it is mentioned in-depth later in this thesis, this intersection gave birth to "social TV" (Cesar & Geerts, 2011, p.347). People started to interact with each other while watching a reality TV show or an episode of their favorite TV shows. With Letterboxd, this shift has shown itself to be even more effective by leading people to be concerned about how they will rate the films they watch at that moment and what kind of reviews they will write for them on the platform. Users also tend to judge and criticize others based on their choices. This concern resulted from Letterboxd being an interactive and community-based platform where people are curious about what the people in their circle think about the related content.

While this shift in the viewing experience became even more visible among cinephiles, another issue started to emerge out of people's need to belong and social identification. Especially young users who define themselves as 'cinephiles' and eventually belong to this community actually find themselves worried about how to rate certain films that are considered 'masterpieces' and 'cult films.' The same concern applied to vice versa. Jullier and Leveratto (2012) state: "The time of "guilty pleasures," linked with the risk of

automatically compromising yourself should you personally enjoy films – whether “commercial” or “intellectual” – that do not fit with current consumption norms in your social group, is now over” (pp. 144-145). Since the year 2012, however, the time of ‘guilty pleasures’ has returned back quite strongly. This specific worry regarding how to be ‘worthy’ of the cinephile community that users tend to embody was not often expressed until social media took a different turn in recent years. Young people turned social media platforms such as Twitter (now called X) and TikTok into places where they could honestly make ‘confessions.’ Slang terms, such as ‘lowkey’ and ‘unpopular opinion,’ describing statements people are afraid of making due to social/peer pressure, have started emerging. The idea of ‘being comfortable with being cringe’ gained popularity in young people’s social media realm, and a new era began in which people stopped ‘pretending’ to fit into a particular community. The more people started to confess such worries they had, the more they began to see that many other people felt the same way about this social impact. Regardless of whether this is a solved issue, I believe that the way people started to talk about this impact as ‘confessions’ is in itself a statement that verifies this concern. Most young people who actively use Letterboxd have felt this impact of others at some point that made them feel obligated to rate some films higher and others lower, regardless of their true feelings about the films, to feel validated and accepted in the cinephile community.

The last part of this thesis, which is inherently connected to the previous one, aims to illuminate the new understanding of cinephilia in the digital age. Around the middle of the 20th century, when the term ‘cinephilia’ started to take its place in dictionaries, it stood for an interest and a strong passion for cinema. Now, however, we are actively witnessing how the channeling of cinephilia is transforming in the digital age, and the term’s connotation is changing. As the way we watch films has changed throughout time, and the

accessibility of movies has rapidly increased with the age of technology, it is inevitable for cinephilia to resist this change.

Platforms like Letterboxd and MUBI can be considered the pioneers of this transformation in cinephilia. While Letterboxd functions as an online space for cinephiles to share their tastes in film, MUBI offers a curated selection of films that aligns with the understanding of contemporary cinephilia, which means a selection that highlights arthouse and independent cinema. This niche approach of MUBI is an important reflection of curation in the context of cinephilia in the digital age. The platform differs from other VOD (video on demand) services and online streaming platforms. "...users do not always automatically accept the expertise of the service, and they are more critical of it than they are of other VOD services (such as Netflix) because they consider watching MUBI as a form of 'intellectual labor'" (İldır, 2024, p.1647). This point of view aligns with MUBI's reputation as a platform that highlights the distinction between "consuming films" and "critically engaging with films." This distinction will be discussed further in the literature review chapter.

Additionally, the importance of rating in today's understanding of cinephilia is undoubtedly on the rise, and it has become a pivotal element in the cinephilia culture in the digital age. Ratings, besides standing for a symbolization of the need to categorize and thus to make sense of the cinematic productions, can also serve as a performative act in relation to it being the building blocks of online cinephile identity construction, which I will explain in further detail in the upcoming chapters. The rating system is also directly related to the idea of canon-building in contemporary cinema. As Letterboxd (or MUBI, as it also encourages ratings) users rate films, they inevitably contribute to the new

curated lists like “films everyone should watch.” Thus, the question of “who decides which films belong on these lists?” arises. While some films become part of the canon because they are widely praised by critics, others can gain recognition through smaller cinephile communities or online platforms, like Letterboxd. The rising popularity of digital platforms has made it easier for people to have a say, and eventually influence, what films are/should be considered important, which has eventually turned the process of canon-building into a more flexible process. The increasing popularity of rating systems and thus the rebirth of the question “who decides what” is highly significant, as this situation is one of the signifiers of the evolving and changing understanding of cinephilia in the digital age, where the idea of a fixed canon is being questioned and reconsidered by the cinephiles of the digital age. Letterboxd, within this context, is contributing to this change –as it is currently the only space that solely serves cinephiles to interact with each other virtually– and is, therefore, paving the way for a new understanding of cinephilia. In light of the given context and the literature reviewed, which is further explained in the following chapter, this thesis proceeds through three research questions: “How does the use of Letterboxd shape the viewing experience of its users?” “To what extent do the other users’ opinions on Letterboxd impact the users in terms of rating and reviewing certain films in an honest manner?” and “How does Letterboxd contribute to the transformation of the understanding of cinephilia in the digital age?”

1.1. Structure and Organization

In this study, extant literature is reviewed to contribute to this thesis. To be able to answer the three research questions this study aims to answer, Chapter 2, Theoretical Framework and Literature Review, delves into the baselines of the thesis; the overarching theory of this study, Erving Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), and the supporting baseline, Henry Jenkins’ *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory*

Culture (1992/2005). Then, it further investigates what has been said previously in the field of media psychology. The literature review part consists of four sections, aiming to answer the three research questions of this study. The first section of the literature review was designed to provide a brief background about the sharing behavior that users assert on social media platforms in general, and how they construct their online identities on these platforms. The other sections are categorized according to the questions they help answer. The third section of Chapter 2, *Shaping Film Watching Practices*, sets out examples from the pre-digital age and how the way people have interacted with audiovisual content and films has changed over the years through technological developments. The fourth section of Chapter 2, *The Influence of Others' Opinions on the Viewing Experience*, focuses on how people feel about interactive media consumption according to the previous research. Lastly, the fifth section of Chapter 2, *The Transformation of Cinephilia in the Digital Age*, aims to explore what cinephilia is, how the concept was born, what cinephilia was like back in the 20th century compared to the 21st, and how what it stands for has changed over the years.

After the literature review, the study moves into Chapter 3, *Methodology*. The chapter explains how the study was conducted, what measures and research methods were used, and why. In order to come up with the most accurate answers to the provided research questions, I created a survey for the participants and used one of the most trustworthy and commonly used research measures commonly used in the field of media psychology, which is the Likert scale. This chapter explains why this method was chosen, how the survey questions were developed, and how it contributed to the research and the overall research design of the study.

The fourth chapter, *Findings*, analyzes the collected data and addresses each research

question. It provides an overview of the collected data, and then approaches the results in a numerical way without any interpretations, ensuring that the collected data is accurately reviewed and presented. The collected data is then interpreted, linking the results to the research questions, and discussing the findings in the light of the literature reviewed.

The last chapter, Discussion and Conclusion, explores the implications of the findings of this study, addresses the limitations of the study, and proposes new approaches for future research in the field. Through the findings, this thesis aims to understand the psychology of Letterboxd users and what cinephilia stands for in the contemporary age.

This topic is significant because digital platforms and online communities like Letterboxd has transformed the way people engage with films in the digital age, and thus, understanding where film culture stands and how these online interactions shape the modern understanding of cinephilia in the contemporary age will be an important contribution to the field and the extant literature of media studies. Examining the Letterboxd users' watching practices and preferences provides valuable insights into scholarly studies on digital communities and social media behavior. Analyzing the channelling of cinephilia through Letterboxd helps film and media scholars to understand how cinephilia adapts to new media circumstances in the digital age. As Letterboxd is a relatively under-explored topic in media studies, this study is significant in terms of how it enriches the academic discourse on online communities and platforms, new audiences, the transformation of cinephilia, and social media psychology.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Goffman, 1959) is the overarching baseline and structural backbone of this study. This sociological study explores the idea of self-presentation and investigates how people control and shape their public selves in social situations through social interactions. Goffman (1959) establishes these personas in theatrical terms, comparing these selves people create to ‘performances’ in people’s everyday lives. He refers to people as ‘performers’ and the people whom the performers interact with as their ‘audiences.’ These are not performances that are limited to particular social settings but happen in most interactions, between formal and casual conversations. So, the idea of being “on-stage” while we appear to be doing ordinary things in life is a powerful demonstration of how Goffman’s theory permeates everyday experience. According to the theory, individuals constantly put on performances in the public eye for others. The theory suggests that we want others to think of us in a certain way we want. “Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interests to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him” (Goffman, 1959, p.3). It does not matter what and how we want others to think about us, but we certainly want to control their behavior towards us, and thus, we play a certain role to see the outcome we want from the

others. This control is needed to keep our identity coherent and tell a consistent story in multiple social spaces since any inconsistency can be an attack against the image we create. Goffman (1959) divides these spaces into two categories and labels them as front stage and backstage.

The front stage is the place where performers put on performances and adapt these projections through the audiences' reactions. It is "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (Goffman, 1959, p.22). As Goffman (1959) also highlights, people put in these performances (regardless of them being either on purpose or unintentional) for the audiences' spectatorship and witnessing, meaning that people are always in a need for acceptance and belonging in social communities and circles. This need to belong can increase in digital spaces, where the visibility of our actions to a larger audience can amplify the pressure to conform to norms and expectations. While this performance we all put in is indeed for getting the desired treatment by our audiences, it is important to take a fact into account, which is how we do not write these roles for ourselves in our minds out of nowhere. In most cases, they were already written for us beforehand. These roles we are expected to play have already been established in the communities where we look for social acceptance. According to the theory, "when an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it" (Goffman, 1959, p.27). In this sense, our performances are both individual and collective, as they are shaped by broader social expectations that dictate what is acceptable and expected in different contexts. The social acceptance factor also brings another element to the table, which is the idealization of the self and the aim of self-realization. Although these performances that are mostly 'expected' by the audiences take place indeed for the audiences themselves, they also take place for our own satisfaction regarding our self-

image as well. “In a sense, and in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to—this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be” (Goffman, 1959, p.19). This search for idealization often leads people to create a version of themselves that aligns with both social expectations and their internalized standards of who they wish to be.

The backstage, on the other hand, is the space where an individual is away from the public eye and gets to be themselves in their own comfort zones, free from the expectations of the front stage. “Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character” (Goffman, 1959, p.112). The backstage is crucial for individuals to maintain their emotional and mental well-being, as it provides a space for authenticity that may not always be possible to present during public performances. Regardless of the time it was published, the theory closely relates to one of the main concerns of this thesis, which is to explore Letterboxd users’ worries regarding how they are perceived on the platform and what impression they give to the cinephile community through their tastes. The goal of this study is to offer these users a ‘backstage’ in Goffman’s (1959) terms, to understand how they truly feel about their behavior in a cinephile platform when they go back to their backstage. However, it is also possible to run into an extreme circumstance, which is the confusion between the act and the reality for the performer. “At one extreme, one finds that the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality” (Goffman, 1959, p.17). The blurry line between performance and authenticity is especially relevant for the case of this thesis, as it implies that users may be convinced in their curated cinephile personas that they present. The validity of this concern will display itself once the results are analyzed.

Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture (Jenkins, 1992/2005) offers a supportive framework to understand the dynamics of cinephilia in the digital age in relation to the Letterboxd community, which is another part to theoretically ground this study. “Forms of participatory culture include creative expressions like fan fiction and digital mash-ups as well as collaborative problem-solving, group affiliation and media circulation” (Hargittai & Walejko, 2008, p.241). Jenkins highly prioritizes the fan behavior in his book, and he refers to the fans of specific audiovisual content and material, such as certain TV shows or film series. His emphasis on fandom behavior as a structured and collective concept allows for a better understanding of how digital platforms like Letterboxd can assert a similar sense of collective engagement among users. In regards to this study, I will adapt the word ‘fan’ for the Letterboxd users, as these users could be considered ‘fans’ towards ‘cinema’ in Jenkins’ approach. Jenkins (1992/2005) examines various different types of fandom culture in his book, and one of his approaches is closely related with the concern of this study, which is the status of fandom as an alternative social community (p.2).

Jenkins (1992/2005) highlights the transformation of fandom into a participatory culture, and this is the case for Letterboxd users as well. “Fandom here becomes a participatory culture which transforms the experience of media consumption into the production of (...) a new culture and a new community” (p.46). In the digital age, platforms like Letterboxd encourage this transformation by enabling users to interact with film content in a way that blurs the lines between traditional passive consumption and active cultural production. For the case of Letterboxd, the users of the platform actively engage in sharing opinions and comments on different films, they can criticize each others’ opinions if they feel the need to, and they can create open lists for the use of other users. Through offering these features, Letterboxd directly creates a participatory culture and contributes to the

channeling and transformation of cinephilia in the digital age. These participatory activities stand for a significant shift from the earlier forms of fan engagement that was more local and limited, pioneering a change in how cinephiles connect and collaborate globally. There used to be “fan club meetings, newsletters, and letterzines as participatory spaces where interpretations were negotiated between readers” (Jenkins, 1992/2005, p.90). Now, there is Letterboxd, enhancing these traditional aspects of cinephile culture in the digital age for contemporary film enthusiasts from all around the world who meet under an online roof.

Jenkins uses the term ‘filk,’ to refer to fan made music content, a similar concept to fan made videos. He uses the term to exemplify the fans’ own creations regarding the content of the fandom, and for the case of Letterboxd, the ‘filk’ can refer to the Letterboxd community’s shared comments, opinions, and lists that are curated by the users to be shared with others. Jenkins aims to highlight filk’s “role as a cultural expression of the ideals, beliefs, and activities of fandom, as a means of articulating an alternative social identity, and as a resource for integrating the community’s diverse interests” (p.258). The concept of filk resonates with the Letterboxd users who often use the platform as a way to assert their cinematic tastes and values, creating an alternative social identity within a global cinephile culture. This role definitely applies to Letterboxd as it does encourage users from all around the world for cultural expression through their tastes. The platform strengthens the cinephiles’ engagement with other cinephiles from different cultural backgrounds, and opens up a space for discovery of films from different countries, and critical discussion. However, to connect this idea of cinephilia in the digital age to the performances we stage within the communities, there is of course an extreme link between fandom and performances. “An individual’s socialization into fandom often requires learning “the right way” to read as a fan, learning how to employ and comprehend the

community's particular interpretive conventions" (Jenkins, 1992/2005, p.91). Although this is not a necessity that occurs within fandom, in this case the 'Letterboxd community,' there are cases like this within the cinephile community where people feel some kind of a peer pressure to enjoy certain filmmakers' works. It is highly unlikely to see a negative criticism on Letterboxd towards the films of Andrey Tarkovsky, Ingmar Bergman, or Jean-Luc Godard, for instance. The socialization Jenkins talks about can be considered a reflection of Letterboxd users' navigation of the platform and how they conform to certain expectations, or expected to conform, about how to criticize and interpret film content. Despite how Jenkins talks about this issue in more of an academic way in his book and agrees with the idea that there must be certain rules and agreed-upon strategies to criticize certain works, in the context of the cinephile community of Letterboxd, learning 'the right way' does not really have a strong foundation, as the film criticism people engage with on Letterboxd is not on an academic level. Jenkins states: "...interpretive conventions are less rigidly defined or precisely followed than within the academy, yet are accepted nevertheless as a necessary basis for fan discussion" (Jenkins, 1992, p.91). The less formal critical conventions on Letterboxd certainly allow for more diverse and personal expressions of cinephilia while also inevitably enabling a space for tensions between mainstream and niche tastes, which can turn Letterboxd into a contested platform for film discourse. These agreed-upon conventions and rules are exactly what makes the concepts of frontstage and backstage emerge for the young cinephiles on Letterboxd. This constant negotiation between personal tastes and community expectations shows us how complicated participatory culture can be on a digital platform like Letterboxd.

2.2. Sharing Behavior and Identity Construction on Social Media

In the digital age, social media platforms occupy a significant space in people's lives and they have so far transformed the way people interact with each other and share their

experiences. The existing research has established that “sharing motivation reflects people’s need for social interaction and social relations” (Xie, 2023, p.155), and this motivation behind the sharing behavior people assert on social media is directly connected to the worries of this thesis, as Letterboxd can be considered an extension of social media. Previous studies found that “users’ sharing of mobile media content was an attempt to seek for entertainment, information discovery, socialization, among other gratifications” (Lee et al., 2011, p.132). Although Letterboxd is primarily a platform for cinephiles, the user practices of the platform are more or less similar to the other social media platforms, such as Twitter (now called X), Instagram, Facebook and so on. As the users engage in sharing their tastes on the platform, their use of this platform also indicates performing an identity. “The virtual materials of this performance are cultural signs—a user’s self-described favorite books, music, movies, television interests, and so forth—composed together into a taste statement that is “performed” through the profile” (Liu, 2007, p.153). This performance of the self that comes as a requirement in social media use inevitably “triggers comparisons between users and reinforces the sense of comparison” (Xie, 2023, p.154).

The favorite films section on people’s Letterboxd profiles stands for an identity construction. “Social network sites are based around profiles, a form of individual (...) home page, which offers a description of each member” (boyd, 2007, p.123). The favorite films section on each profile indeed constitute the building blocks of who we are on the platform, or who we want ourselves to be perceived as, just like how it works on the popular social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (now called X). “The construction of identity on social networking platforms is so flexible that people can design, hide, or even alter their identity if they want” (Jeyanthi, 2022, p.140). As Letterboxd serves as a space that expects people to show their relationship to cinema, and

at some point prove it to others, people feel obliged to present themselves the most “cinophile” way possible. People’s desire for self-presentation brings within an automatic filter, or even a censorship mechanism, which can lead individuals to curate profiles that align with specific norms depending on the platform. “When profiles are constructed through a series of generic forms, there is plenty of room for [the users] to manipulate the profiles to express themselves” (boyd, 2007, p.127). This need for self expression does not necessarily occur in community settings solely, but it also applies to the settings where there is an imagined audience. “Expanded and invisible audiences are created in these virtual communities when an individual posts information about herself, or engages in social interactions publicly on the profile “wall”, for it is unclear exactly who will be observing that communication” (Manago et al., 2008, p.448). The users on online platforms consider these imagined audiences, meaning that who they believe will view their profiles, and they end up adjusting their profiles to meet the expectations of these anticipated viewers. The imagined audience can consist of friends, family, acquaintances, or strangers, and it impacts the users’ shared taste and content. As Marwick and boyd (2011) suggest,

Our understanding of the social media audience is limited. While anyone can potentially read or view a digital artifact, we need a more specific conception of audience than ‘anyone’ to choose the language, cultural referents, style, and so on that comprise online identity presentation (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p.115).

Thus, the process of creating an online identity is in fact a negotiation between the users’ personal expression, and their desire for social recognition. In a study conducted on the use of Letterboxd (Turgut, 2024), it was found that the films on users' profiles, the ratings they give to the movies they watch and the reviews they write constitute an identity construction on the platform.

Letterboxd profiles, users' movie preferences, and reviews become an indicator of cultural capital through their ratings. In these networks, participants strive to distinguish themselves from other users or to achieve a certain status. Therefore, a hierarchy is constructed between participants based on their profiles on Letterboxd (Turgut, 2024, p.272).

The process behind the construction of an ideal online identity, however, does not occur independently from external factors. Social recognition is an important factor in how users present themselves on online platforms. When it comes to the question of why people enjoy sharing content on social media, it was found that some of the strongest motivations for the assertion of this sharing behavior were the social recognition and socialization factors. It was established that “people who care about social recognition are more likely to share (...) content on social media” (Yelpaze, 2021, p.144). An important highlight and extension of this finding was that the participants who care about the social recognition element tended to agree more with the collective opinions, as they wanted to be approved by the majority to be eventually recognized by them. (Yelpaze, 2021, p.144). “Evidence has highlighted that self-worth staked in the domain of approval from others promotes behaviors such as social comparison, as well as internalization of societal ideals” (Stapleton et al., 2017, p.143). As people who use social media observe the behaviors of others on these platforms, this leads to a tendency of social comparison on the platforms they use (Kocabıyık, 2021, p.448).

The idea of accommodating the collective opinion brings within the question of users' reliability in terms of creating honest content on social media, which is directly related to one of the significant points of this thesis. As users gain some kind of gratification from their act of socializing on these platforms, this satisfaction can create the tendency of sharing content that is not honest or accurate (Apuke & Omar, 2021, p.12).

2.3. Shaping Film Watching Practices

The ultimate audiovisual material consumption experience has significantly changed since the world entered the digital age and the effects of late capitalism started to appear. “Any act of viewing is layered with options of simultaneous and interruptive actions, choices, and feedback. The idea of long blocks of time spent exclusively as a spectator is outmoded” (Crary, 2013). With the emergence of digitalization and the increasing technical opportunities in media consumption, the position of the audience in this new relationship with the new media, has started to be an important factor in most of the media research. “As audiences become less predictable, more fragmented or more variable in their engagement with media, understanding the audience is even more important for theories of social shaping” (Livingstone, 1999, p.63). It was found out by a research (Smith & Boyles, 2012) that was conducted by Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, that “cell phones allow viewers to engage more deeply with televised content by letting viewers seek out additional information or commentary about programming that interests them” (p.6). It was now proven by research that the audiences of the digital age were interested in multi-screen experiences as they felt more connected to the other viewers (Smith & Boyles, 2012, p.7). The digital age gave birth to a new viewing understanding, defined as “digital spectatorship.” The most revolutionary feature of this new spectatorial mode was the emergence of “speed watching,” which is a feature that enables the viewer to experience audiovisual content at a faster speed. “This compact mode of spectatorship is based on a system of frame skipping, and it is therefore substantially different from earlier modes of time shifting such as the “fast-forward” function on VCR or “skip” function on DVR” (Alexander, 2017, p.105). The fundamental viewing experience was changed and adapted to the digital age. “The stop, fast forward, and rewind buttons of new technologies have further reconstructed the boundaries between film, viewer, and author through the disruption of theatrical exhibition’s temporal

and immersive flow” (Gorfinkel, 2008, p.37). As this new world demanded people to live faster, speed-watching enabled people to consume the content they chose faster, “resulting in the illusion that nothing went missing” (Alexander, 2017, p.105). Despite the illusion that people have found themselves in, this new feature has been proven to be helpful for most people who do not have enough time to consume viewing material in their busy lives. This feature was more of a concrete and technical one, but as the age of technology progressed, there was another emerging need for people. This time, it was a psychological one, bringing a new layer to the viewing experience: an interactive way of viewing.

Cesar and Geerts (2011) argue that there is now a phenomenon termed “social TV,” which refers to viewers’ use of a second screen during the viewing experience. This phenomenon was a significant shift in how audiences engaged with media, indicating a blend of passive consumption and active social interaction. It can be considered a game changer for its time and certainly a new layer to the experience of watching. First, the ultimate space for this new experience was Twitter, as the “use of Twitter to connect and support conversations between audience members for live or mediated entertainment” (Highfield et al., 2013, p.316) was a highly popular activity, altering the way viewers shared and reacted in real time. The use of Twitter as an online community for fans and audiences of specific entertainment material, such as Eurovision Song Contest in the context of Highfield’s work, caused the emergence of new questions regarding “how such second-screen activity might change television viewing habits, (...) and whether the most (...) productive of such intersections (...) may come to create entirely new media practices” (Highfield et al., 2013, p.317). These second-screen activities did lead to the birth of new media practices, one of which is what the platform Letterboxd offers for its users. Letterboxd added another aspect to this change of experience, expanding this sphere of social interaction to a space of film viewing and critique. Even though it is not as

physically synchronized as the concept of “social TV,” this new way of viewing comes with a mental synchronization of the viewer to the content, meaning that this new habit makes the viewer constantly think about how they will rate the film on Letterboxd as they watch at that moment and what review they will write for it. Users also tend to think about their own social circle’s ratings beforehand and are affected by other people’s reviews during the viewing experience, which indicates a form of social pressure or influence. Academics in this field have brought forward that viewers may be influenced by social information due to the “judgment effect,” in which viewers modify their assessments of content based on the social material they have (Möller et al., 2021, p.27), confirming the impact of these digital platforms on media consumption behaviors of people.

In the same year that Cesar and Geerts’ (2011) work was published, another similar study by Wohn & Na (2011) was conducted, and it also aimed to explore changing television viewing habits. This study uses the uses and gratifications perspective (Katz et al., 1973) as a theoretical framework, and the main focus of the study is the audience’s use of Twitter hashtags while consuming TV-based content. Wohn and Na found out that “social media is recreating a pseudo “group viewing” experience of television” (Wohn & Na, 2011, p.10). By using the term “pseudo,” the researchers wanted to highlight how the viewers do not “communicate directly with each other (...), the use of hashtags and re-tweets suggests that (...) they want to be part of a larger group” (Wohn & Na, 2011, p.10). This reflects how online platforms serve as enablers for shared experiences, despite how they lack the immediacy of face-to-face interaction. Another research article (Schirra et al., 2014) establishes several motivations between and practices of social TV behavior. The results indicate that these motivations include “a desire to feel connected to a larger community” (Schirra et al., 2014, p.2441). This outcome can be linked to Wohn and Na’s findings, demonstrating that the collective engagement with media via social network can

transcend geographical boundaries. In the case of this thesis, this motivation, the need to feel connected to a larger group, corresponds to Letterboxd users' desire to feel connected to a cinephile community.

Han and Lee's *Motivations for the complementary use of text-based media during linear TV viewing: An exploratory study* (2014) explores the concept of "linear TV" and the audiences' use of text-based media either during or after the act of viewing. The concept refers to "a television service where the viewer watches a scheduled TV program at the particular time it is offered" (Han & Lee, 2014, p.235). This phenomenon highlights how viewers increasingly tend to layer digital interaction over traditional and scheduled programming. The researchers of the study detect five different types of motivation for the use of text-based media in linear TV viewing. Han and Lee (2014) argue that the audiences' motivations for the use of text-based media during TV consumption are "communication about the impressions of a broadcast; information sharing and seeking; feelings of coviewing; curiosity about others' opinions; and program recommendations" (2014, p.235). These motivations indicate how traditional TV viewing is no longer a solitary experience, but rather an experience that is shapeshifting into a collaborative and participatory one. One of the five extracted categories of motivation for linear TV viewing, "communication about the impressions of a broadcast," covers the dimensions of "trying to develop a bond of sympathy about a program being viewed" (2014, p.238) and "developing a bond of sympathy among communication parties beyond expression and sharing of simple impressions or opinions" (2014, p.238). This highlights how the emotional connection factor in shared viewership now extends beyond physical spaces to virtual communities.

A recent study (Turgut, 2024) on Letterboxd and its relation to viewing experience in terms of how it altered the concept of spectatorship explores a similar concern with this thesis'. This shift reflects broader changes in how digital platforms have reshaped traditional media consumption in this age. The research focuses on how the users of Letterboxd experience the activity of film-watching and how the dynamics of cinematic spectatorship changed for them in the digital age. While Turgut (2024) examines the broader behavioral shifts in how users approach the act of watching in relation with their use of Letterboxd. This thesis, however, takes a different approach by delving into psychological and sociological aspects of Letterboxd use. Focusing on the navigation of self-presentation within the cinephile community, it aims to delve deeper than solely behavioral practices of Letterboxd users. The participants of Turgut's study explain how Letterboxd not only affects the way they watch films, but also changes the motivations behind consuming cinematic content (Turgut, 2024, p.268). The study shows how users' film consumption can turn into a race with other users and even how it can be related to people's fear of missing out (Turgut, 2024, p.269). This suggests a deeper transformation in the audience behavior, where watching films is not solely a personal experience but also a performative one for their social networks. Another finding the study has discovered is that the number of films people have watched (the statistics are available in every user's profile) can make other users feel inadequate. This feeling motivates people to watch more films so that they can add them to their film diary on Letterboxd. Ultimately, this means that users do not always watch films because they simply want to, but for the sake of logging the film to their diary on Letterboxd. This competitive element suggests how platforms like Letterboxd can turn the casual viewing experience into a status-seeking activity.

Since the participants of this research are specifically university students between the ages of 18 and 25, it is also essential to distinguish young people's habits in terms of media consumption. "University students are among the highest users of technology and are typically early adopters of new technologies, (...) a lot of time is spent on all these forms of technology and it is now increasingly integrated into students' lives" (Tassew, 2020, p.62). Younger generations who are raised in the digital age show unique media habits that differ from the older audiences. Chang's (2016) study takes notice of the age factor in media psychology, and it explicitly approaches college students intending to understand why they multitask with multiple media. The results of the research indicate that the reason young people are so engaged in the multiplicity of media is that they are high sensation seekers, meaning that they are in need of some type of arousal (Chang, 2016, p.701). Chang uses the "Uses and Gratification Theory" (Katz et al., 1973) as a theoretical background in her study, which is a theory that defends that people actively choose which kind of media they want to consume and that they are selective and conscious in the selecting process. In line with the provided literature, the following sub-research questions have emerged:

RQ1a: How is the viewing experience of Letterboxd users affected by the use of the platform?

RQ1b: How are the viewing motivations of Letterboxd users affected by the structure of the platform?

2.4. The Influence of Others' Opinions on Opinion Formation

The influence of other people's opinion on how we choose what media product to consume and how we perceive the related content has gained attention in communications research in the last years, where social media has become a prominent part of our lives. "With the increasing popularity and use of social media, more and more people are (...) relying more on online reviews and recommendations" (Wang, 2023, p.1198). This behavior was not only observed in social media use, but also in people's viewing practices in the digital age. According to the MAIN model Sundar has come up with, the viewers often tend to think, "If others like this content, then I should too" (Sundar, 2008b, p.83). This thought process of the viewers, being related to the social dynamics, suggests that social acceptance heavily influences media consumption patterns. According to the author, this finding results from the bandwagon heuristic, a term that stands for a cognitive bias that individuals tend to have. This bias makes them believe that what they think about a particular subject must align with what others think, which results in individuals being influenced by others' opinions and not being able to evaluate that subject individually. The pressure to adapt to the mainstream idea becomes so strong for the viewers that personal judgments often get overshadowed by communal opinions. They tend to end up following the others' way of thinking. Initial research suggests that "Curiosity about others' opinions' refers to the motivation of wondering about others' opinions or trying to determine whether others' opinions are identical to one's own" (Han & Lee, 2014, p.239). This bias has long been a concern in media psychology and user psychology, regardless of the different perspectives the researchers looked into the issue.

A research (Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al., 2011) examines how peer reviews and ratings affect audiences' enjoyment of a narrative. The authors found that there is a significant

relationship between other people's opinions and what the audiences think of a certain narrative material. This correlation between collective opinion and individual enjoyment highlights the psychological mechanisms that guide audience reception in the digital age. Their work "suggests that participants who review peer evaluations about a narrative entertainment experience, such as a short story, may approach the stimulus with certain expectations, which will guide their attention to elements of the narrative that confirm the initial evaluations" (Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al., 2011, p.112). This result is directly correlated with one of the theoretical backgrounds of this study. The study is partially supporting Goffman's (1959) theory in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, that is, "one finds that the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality" (Goffman, 1959, p.17). In a sense, the act of consuming media becomes performative as the viewers adopt and embrace the collective opinions of their social circles. As the audiences are influenced by the peer reviews, such as how they tend to like the films that people talk positively of, for instance, directly relates to the idea of being taken by one's own act and not knowing whether one is performing or not. Other people's thoughts and opinions regarding a certain narrative material can highly affect our understanding and experience of that narrative, and we might not be sure about whether we actually think the same as the others or not. This ambiguity creates a blurred line between authentic and socially influenced reactions, which is a crucial point to understand audience reception and user psychology in general.

Another research in this area (Waddell & Sundar, 2017) found that social media commentary will affect program enjoyment, and the effects of social media comments on enjoyment depend on the individual's processing style, depending on whether it is

heuristic or systematic processing. While heuristic processing is how people decide instantaneously based on the information received at that moment, systematic processing refers to a more articulated style of thinking and evaluating, which includes comparison and effort. These two pathways show how viewers' media engagement can be either surface-level or deeply analytical, depending on the viewers' approach. The researchers suggest that this type of evaluation was deterministic, and this finding indeed offers a new perspective into the scope of this thesis. The study of Möller et al. (2021) added another layer to these findings and revealed that it was significant when the viewer received the social information. The researchers discovered that the effects on the viewer changed depending on whether they were exposed to other people's comments "before" or "after" the viewing experience (Möller et al., 2021, p.25). When the social information was provided before the viewing experience, "a processing effect" rose to the occasion. In the case of viewers being exposed to the social comments after the viewing experience, "a judgment effect" occurred. The term "processing effect" stands for how others' comments create a level of expectation about the content (Möller et al., 2021, p.27). Möller's study brought another new perspective to the field by testing if there is a difference between participants' exposure to positive and negative information. This research shed light on how deeply social information can affect the viewing experience. They discovered that viewers who received positive information enjoyed the content they viewed more than those who received negative social information (p.42). Eventually, it was once again proven how much it matters to know what others think about content for an individual to construct a final opinion regarding the material.

Similar research revealed that "...peer comments by strangers exert an influence that alters the emotional reactions toward video material" (Krämer et al., 2019, p.355). They also

found it essential to highlight the role of social identification (Krämer et al., 2019, p.355), which is a valuable point to bring forward since most of the research in this field is inevitably connected to this concept. Regarding the social identification factor, the study explored that the comments of others on a certain video material were only impactful when the comments were in alignment with the viewer's own thoughts about the content (p.354). It showed that people wanted to see their opinions agreed with and supported. This alignment asserts the comfort of shared taste, making media consumption a communal rather than an individual-based activity. Winter et al. (2018) also conducted another research to understand how social TV works for audiences in the digital age. Their study aimed to examine the effects of social TV interactions and peer comments on the viewers (p.33). They found that the influence of others' opinions was apparent in the viewers' private and public opinions (p.33). What the participants think about certain audiovisual material was highly affected and shaped by others' thoughts and opinions (p.35). This external influence challenges the notion of personal media preferences being solely self-established.

Researchers have predicted several motivations for engaging in co-viewing activities (Cohen & Lancaster, 2014), such as emotional contagion and the need to belong. However, the findings suggested that emotional contagion was not a predicting factor in social media co-viewing or any sort of participatory behavior through social media (p.516). They found that the element of emotional contagion was present in an organic way on face-to-face occasions (p.516). People's need to belong, on the other hand, was an important motivator for co-viewing, considering how they tend to use social media during a watching experience (p.516). This need to belong asserts a collective desire to seek validation and align with the opinions of others. To sum up, it has been found that social media co-viewing can offer plenty of opportunities for social interaction for people who

watch TV alone in person (Cohen & Lancaster, 2014, p.512). Although the purpose of this study was more concerned with television co-viewing, I believe that the findings about the motivations of people for TV co-viewing, such as emotional contagion and the need to belong, are highly likely to be the same driving forces behind people's use of Letterboxd.

A research on the consumption habits of movies (Horváth & Gyenge, 2015) finds a link between the consumer behavior and group dynamics. "The need to identify with a group may have an influence similar to the classical choices of products or brands in the case of choosing a certain movie to watch as well" (2015, p.45). This suggests that people's media consumption, such as movie selection in this case, can be driven by their desire to fit in with a certain group, in the same way that people choose brands or products to align with group norms. Although not directly related to the concerns of this study, Horváth and Gyenge's work highlights the importance of the need to identify in a group setting where the group members choose which movie to watch.

Depending on whether they watch a movie alone or with acquaintances, entirely different factors may predominate in the choices of the consumers: while they might prefer a certain genre and type of movie with a given group, they might prefer something completely different at home, alone (Horváth & Gyenge, 2015, p.45).

Their research aligns with the overarching theory of this thesis, Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. The authors of the study, possibly without realizing, refer to the concepts of front stage and back stage concepts Goffman came up with. Despite the fact that these authors try to understand the motivations behind movie consumption and how people choose what to watch, their point regarding the group dynamics supports this thesis' point of view. While further describing this phenomenon, they state: "Typical examples of this phenomenon could be the movies that are commonly

referred to (mostly in the American slang) as “guilty pleasures” that might not be considered favorable in public by anyone even if they have seen them numerous times” (Horváth & Gyenge, 2015, p.45). This suggests that individuals often conceal certain preferences of opinions to conform to social expectations. The idea of a “guilty pleasure” reflects the tension between public and private tastes, where individuals may enjoy content privately but avoid expressing their enjoyment publicly due to the fear of social judgment. People care about what other people will think of their tastes and opinions, and thus, this often leads to a performance in front of their audiences. In the case for Letterboxd users, these audiences are the cinephile communities, or the Letterboxd community in general.

Another essential element for understanding user psychology is the individuals’ “need for cognition.” Though unrelated to any kind of viewing experience, another study (Lee & Jang, 2010) in the media psychology field investigated readers’ reactions toward news on the internet and how these reactions affected individuals’ understanding of public opinion (Lee & Jang, 2010, p.825). Their research found that other people’s opinions strongly impacted how some people perceived the news on the internet (p.841). The study used the element of need for cognition as a moderator while analyzing the data. The term “need for cognition” stands for the need of individuals to rationalize and use their own cognition to engage in mental activities. Depending on the individual, the need for cognition can be classified as low or high, meaning that the amount of engagement varies from one person to another. While low NFC shows itself as the tendency to be more affected by personal biases and rely on stereotypes to conclude judgment, high NFC means the exact opposite. The results of the study proved the significance of the “need for cognition” by handling this issue from a more complex and psychological perspective. This shows that people’s levels of cognitive engagement influence how they process media content. Like emotional

contagion and the need to belong, the need for cognition is another element that needs to be considered in media psychology, specifically user psychology. In the light of given literature, the following sub-research question has emerged:

RQ2a: To what extent is the impact of other users' opinions on Letterboxd users are correlated with their need to belong to a cinephile community?

2.5. The Transformation of Cinephilia in the Digital Age

Cinephilia, even to this day, is debated in terms of whether it is dead or transformed and gained a new definition in the digital age. "New and emerging technologies inform much of the current thinking about cinema, not only those technologies of exhibition and film form, but also those related to wider communication practices" (Llinares & Arnold, 2015, p.6). While several different definitions exist for the concept, such as "a particular way of loving movies: eclectic, voracious, (...) a form of addiction that hoped never to be sated" (Morrison, 2005, p.394), Campbell (2009) establishes that there is a certain difference between being a "cinephile" and being a "consumer." He believes that in the age of mass production, it is crucial to be able to separate the "mass-cult product" that is trying to be sold to us and the work that carries an artistic value. "If we do not use our heads, employing "scrupulous erudition," we are not being cinephiles but rather just buyers. In this case we could truly be said to deserve a squandered life in front of screens" (Campbell, 2009, p.211). While ideas like Campbell's represent a certain standpoint and criticism regarding cinephilia, there is a train of thought that stands on the opposite side of this debate, and it claims that these "mass-cult products" can also be included in cinephilia, that they do not need to be excluded from cinephilia necessarily. Gerald Mast (1974) proposes, for instance, that the "cinematic" is not a necessity and that the strength

of the product's impact on the audience is what matters. He criticizes the common way of thinking among scholars and critics, "If illegitimate cinema can be good cinema, its legitimacy and all the reasons for it are irrelevant. The commonsensical position is that good films must be examples of good cinema, and good cinema must necessarily be "cinematic"" (Mast, 1974, p.377). He exemplifies the importance of the audience factor based on the case of *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* and highlights how the film has managed to captivate audiences over decades despite the heavy criticisms it received due to its stylistic aspects (Mast, 1974, p.377). He establishes that the impact of the film is more vital compared to its "cinematic" quality (Mast, 1974, p.377). Putting the audience in the center of cinema and cinephilia, Mast's perspective also applies to what cinephilia stands for in the digital age.

Susan Sontag, back in 1996, claimed that cinema was a decadent art, and so cinephilia was inevitably doomed to death, too (Sontag, 1996, p.1). When it was first born, the main ritual of cinephilia was inherently going to the movie theaters to experience films. "The 1960's and early 1970's was the feverish age of movie-going, with the full-time cinephile always hoping to find a seat as close as possible to the big screen, ideally the third row center" (Sontag, 1996, p.1). With the arrival of television, followed by VCRs and DVDs, the ultimate viewing experience has started to shift since it was no longer necessary to see movies in theaters. "All in all, (...) contemporary forms of cinephilia are quite different from the "historical" or classical cinephilia associated with the theater, as well as from the modern cinephilia born with the emergence of television" (Jullier & Leveratto, 2012, p.144). Movies started to be accessible to watch at home, and this was when the idea of "watching films" turned into "consuming films," as they were now tangible items that people could possess copies of. They have become a part of and adapted to the consumerist society. While some authors like Sontag think that this shift was the end for

cinema and cinephilia (Sontag, 1996, p.1), people on the other side of this thought spectrum thought that this shift had strengthened the love of cinema for people. De Valck (2010) suggests:

The position that cinema is not dead, then, and in fact is far from dying, is not only backed up by numerous examples of a flourishing art form, but also with the observation that film lovers still invest considerable time and effort in watching and discussing great films (...) watching DVDs at home, and participating in film communities on the internet (p.134).

The technological changes have “not only radically transformed film production, but also brought about profound alterations for individual and collective engagement with the cinema” (Hagener, 2016, p.182). Vidal (2017) suggests that this transition “to this domesticated “new cinephilia” created new rituals and forms of compulsive love” (p.406). Such a transition did not necessarily need to be a signifier of death for cinephilia. It could also mean the emergence of an elevated and transformed kind of love towards cinema in the age of post-cinema. “Cinema as an institution and an experience seems to have lost pride of place in the social imaginary (...), but its resilience as an object of love has deepened with its imbrication with other media, notably television and the digital” (Vidal, 2017, p.406).

Besides the viewing traditions, another vital practice of cinephilia is considered to be film criticism. Discussing and arguing about cinema, film theory, and films in general, have been some of the most important elements that give meaning to cinephilia. Starting from the day cinema was born, film criticism was an important value and tradition that made cinema transfer to future generations. It is an important nourishment for cinema to grow and stay relevant to this age. However, in the age of post-cinema, “the proliferation of amateur cinephiliac writing on the Web especially can be seen as oil on the fire lit by

those criticizing serious criticism as elitist and contemptuous of mass culture” (De Valck, 2010, p.135). With the digitalization of cinema and increasing accessibility of cinematic products, the place of film criticism as a profession has started to shatter over time. “What the web has accelerated is the numbers of amateur film critics and the mid-twentieth-century narrative against amateurism in favour of professional, paid expertise” (McWhirter, 2016, p.128). The emergence of digital film platforms that offer the chance to write film reviews online opened a door for every cinema-lover to engage in film criticism, and thus, a valid question arose: “...where is the value for money in paying professional film critics when plenty of reviews, discussion groups, and blogs are already available online?” (De Valck, 2010, p.135). While this question is still highly relevant to this day, the answer to this question, either way, does not denote that the cinephilia has lost its meaning or practice in the digital age.

The cinephilia of the present moment is no less passionate and anxious than historical versions of cinephilia. Even a cursory excursion into some of the online forums for cinephilia, including the Facebook group Confessions of a Cinephile, demonstrates the sometimes protectively pugnacious quality of self-professed cinephiles (and cine-haters) (Keller, 2020, p.86).

In the light of the given literature, the following sub-research question has emerged:

RQ2b: How does Letterboxd contribute to the transformation of cinephilia in the digital age?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This study uses qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to investigate how Letterboxd has altered the film-watching experience and the influence that social circles can have on people's thoughts and perceptions of films. The main purpose of using the chosen research methodology is to grasp an in-depth understanding of how Letterboxd users feel and think about their own actions and habits regarding film consumption and to detect if there is any visible change that Letterboxd has brought into the film-watching experience for the users of the platform. This thesis aims to illuminate how young Letterboxd users watch films differently in the digital age and how the use of Letterboxd can cause this significant change in people's behavior. This chapter aims to describe how this research is conducted in a detailed way.

3.2. Design

A survey experiment that consisted of 22 questions in total, 7 open-ended, 15 in Likert scale format, was designed. While the first 7 questions were asked to test the eligibility of the participants and reach the intended focus group, the Likert scale questions were designed to serve the purpose of this study, which is understanding Letterboxd users' engagement with the platform.

A total of 303 participants' data was analyzed. The age average of the participants was 20.9 (see Table 1). 54.7 percent of the participants (166 participants) identified as women, 37.6 percent (114 participants) as men, 3.96 percent (12 participants) as non-binary, 0.33 percent as transgender (1 participant), 0.66 percent (2 participants) as other, and 2.64 percent (8 participants) preferred not to answer (see Table 2). 98.3 percent of the participants were students at universities located in Turkey, whereas 1.7 percent of the participants were students at different universities in Canada, Germany, and Hungary.

Table 1. Gender Statistics

Gender	Number of Participants
Woman	166
Man	114
Non-binary	12
Transgender	1
Prefer not to say	8
Other	2

Table 2. Age Statistics

Age	Number of Participants
18	15
19	55
20	78
21	48
22	48
23	31
24	15
25	13

The 7 open-ended questions at the beginning of the survey aimed to detect the participants' age, gender, education status, the time period of their use of Letterboxd, and what they use the Letterboxd platform for. Participants were asked to state their level of relatability to the following 15 Likert scale questions through numbers, 1 indicating “Strongly Disagree,” and 5 indicating “Strongly Agree.”

Table 3. Survey Statements for Changing Viewing Practices

“I feel that the way I watch films has changed since I have started using Letterboxd.”	Turgut (2024)
“I think about how I will rate a film as I am watching the film.”	Data-driven Insights
“I think about what review I will write for a film as I am watching the film.”	Data-driven Insights
“If I hadn’t used Letterboxd, I doubt I would have watched as many films as I do today.”	Turgut (2024)
“I find myself watching films just for the sake of logging them on my Letterboxd diary.”	Turgut (2024)

Table 4. Survey Statements for the Influence of Others’ Opinions

“I feel the impact of other users’ ratings while rating a film”	Turgut (2024)
“I feel that I am not being completely honest while rating a film”	Turgut (2024)
“I think about what other users will think about me after seeing a rating/review I gave/wrote for a film”	Turgut (2024)

“I find myself needing to belong to a certain cinephile community while using Letterboxd.”

Data-driven Insights

Table 5. Survey Statements for the Transformation of Cinephilia in the Digital Age

“I feel that I will be judged by other users because of a rating/review I give/write for a film.”	Turgut (2024)
“I judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their favorite films section,”	Turgut (2024)
“I judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their opinions on a certain film,”	Turgut (2024)
“I find myself competing with certain users in terms of how many films I’ve watched compared to them,”	Turgut (2024)
“After I’ve watched a film, I read about what other users on the platform wrote about that film,”	Turgut (2024)
“I think that Letterboxd offers a variety of perspectives regarding people’s reviews and criticisms about films.”	Turgut (2024)

3.3 Survey Question Development

The survey questions used in this research were adapted from Onur Turgut’s research, *The Relationship Between Film Discovery Networks and Viewing Experience: The Example of Letterboxd* (2024), as well as from data-driven insights from social media platforms, such as Twitter (now called X) and TikTok, where user-generated content on Letterboxd users’

change of viewing practices is a topic of discussion. Turgut's research examined film discovery networks with a specific focus on Letterboxd and how the platform impacted the viewing dynamics of Letterboxd users in the digital age. The interview questions of Turgut's study (2024) and the answers the interviewees have provided were adapted to the context of this study on Letterboxd user behavior. Below is a detailed explanation of the adaptation process for each statement, both from Turgut's research (2024) and user-generated social media content.

Statement 1: "I feel that the way I watch films has changed since I started using Letterboxd."

This statement was adapted from the first research question of Turgut's study (2024), which is: "How does Letterboxd influence users' preferences and how does it change their viewing habits?" In the context of this thesis, the question was adjusted into a statement for the participants to rate on a scale from 1 to 5. The goal was to reach a general understanding of users' self-observations in terms of their viewing habits.

Statements 2 and 3: "I think about how I will rate a film as I am watching the film," and "I think about what review I will write about a film as I am watching the film."

These statements were informed by observations made on Twitter (now called X) and TikTok, where a significant number of users expressed similar self-observations of a change of habits they exhibit during a viewing practice. A public account on Twitter (now called X) wrote: "We finish the movie, I immediately open Letterboxd and write a review, it's a very critical moment." (Figure 5) A public TikTok account posted a TikTok with the caption "you're trying to watch a movie without thinking about what ur one line letterboxd review is gonna be." (Figure 6) Another public account on Twitter (now called X) wrote:

“I always open Letterboxd in the middle of a film, log the film and write a review before I even see the end of it, I can’t help it.” (Figure 7) These social media posts were an inspiration for these two statements of this study to be included in the set of questions. Although all of these expressions were related to the review option on Letterboxd, I wanted to explore if the same case applies to the rating option on the platform as well.

Figure 5. A Screenshot of a Tweet on Twitter (now called X)

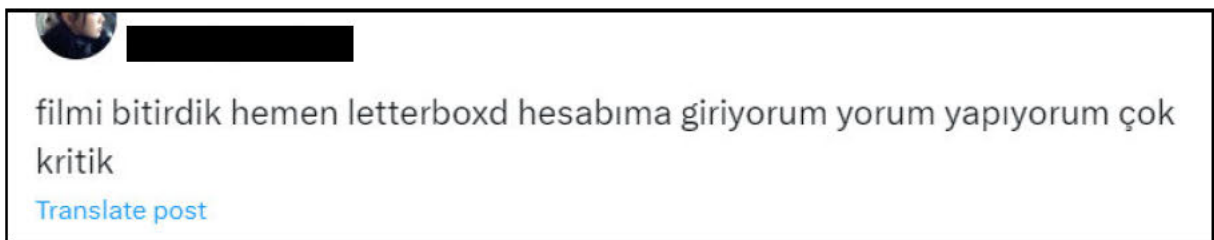


Figure 6. A Screenshot of a TikTok Post on TikTok

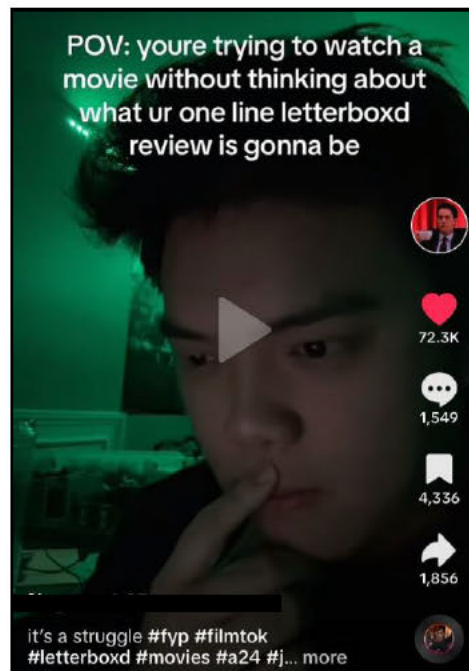
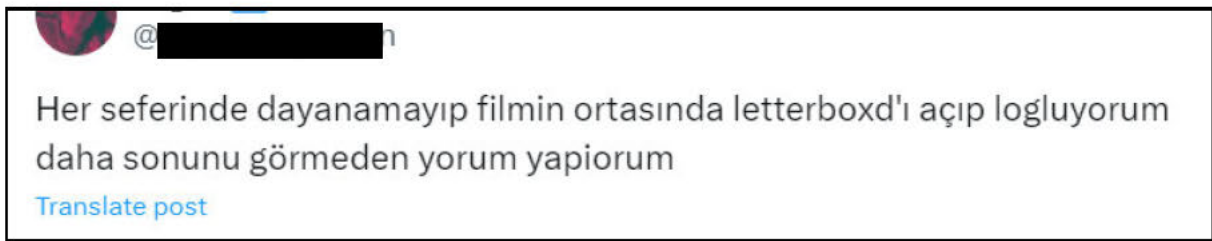


Figure 7. A Screenshot of a Tweet on Twitter (now called X)



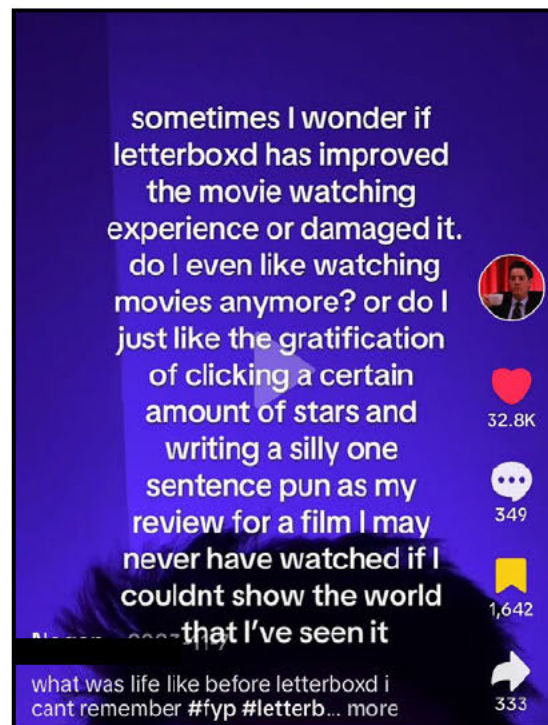
Statements 4, 5, and 13: “If I hadn’t used Letterboxd, I doubt I would have watched as many movies as I do today,” “I find myself watching films just for the sake of logging them on my Letterboxd diary,” and “I find myself competing with certain users in terms of how many films I’ve watched compared to them.”

These statements were adapted from an interview question in Turgut’s study (2024) and the answers that were provided for the interview question. “The participants were asked whether Letterboxd prompted them to binge-watch, and then, based on their responses, whether the platform made them feel left behind” (Turgut, 2024, p.268). One of the participant’s response was: “I mean, how can I put it, there is always a desire to increase the numbers. (...) You know, the concern of in how long I can reach 10,000 [movies] started for me after this, after I opened [an account on] Letterboxd” (Turgut, 2024, p.268). Another participant asserted that they felt the need to show others how many films they have watched so far. “I was obsessed for a couple of months and I competed with myself. (...) You want to show something, you have to show your relationship with cinema on Letterboxd” (Turgut, 2024, p.268).

Besides the participants’ responses in Turgut’s study (2024), data-driven insights from social media were also an influence on the emergence of these statements. There were two public TikTok posts that talked about Letterboxd being a motivation for people to watch more films, and how they like the gratification they get from rating films on the platform.

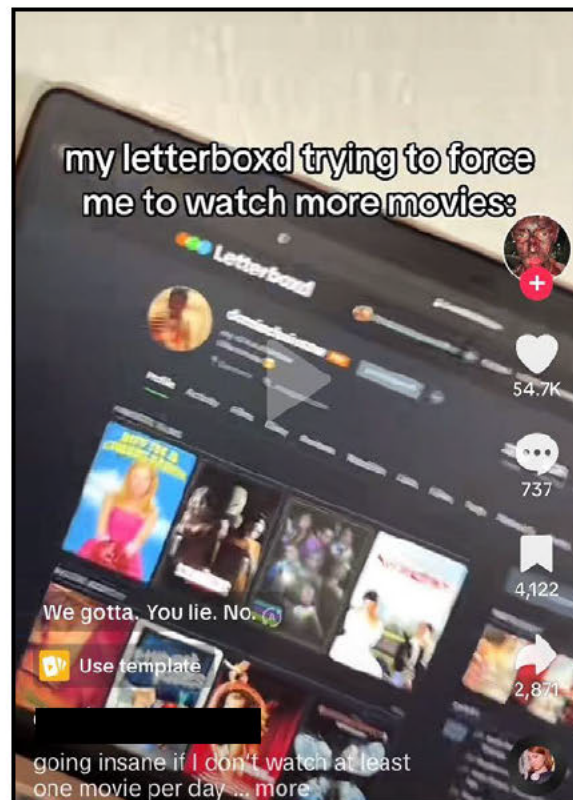
A public TikTok account posted a TikTok with the caption “sometimes I wonder if letterboxd has improved the movie watching experience or damaged it. do I even like watching movies anymore? or do I just like the gratification of clicking a certain amount of stars and writing a silly one sentence pun as my review for a film I may never have watched if I couldnt show the world that I’ve seen it” (Figure 8)

Figure 8. A Screenshot of a TikTok Post on TikTok



Another public account on TikTok posted a TikTok with the caption “my letterboxd trying to force me to watch more movies” (Figure 9). In the context of this thesis, Turgut’s interview question, the answers to that question and these social media posts were an inspiration for these two statements of this study, 4 and 5, to be included in the set of questions.

Figure 9. A Screenshot of a TikTok Post on TikTok



Statement 6: “I feel the impact of other users’ ratings while rating a film.”

This statement was adapted from an interview question in Turgut’s study (2024), where “the participants were asked about the impact of comments and evaluations of other users on Letterboxd on them” (Turgut, 2024, p.271). In the context of this thesis, this interview question was adjusted into a statement for the participants to rate on a Likert scale, and one of the participants’ answer to this question led me to come up with another survey question, which is explained below.

Statement 7: “I feel that I am not being completely honest while rating a film.”

This statement was adapted from a participant’s answer to an interview question in Turgut’s study (2024). This participant was asked about the impact of comments and evaluations of other users on Letterboxd on them, and the answer they provided was “I don’t like to read the comments first, because I think they might change my own interpretation. I might be influenced by them” (Turgut, 2024, p.271). This answer was an important self-reflection for Turgut’s study as the comment offers a different perspective from other participants. I found this result important to adapt and include into my set of questions, since I wanted to see if the participants of my study would feel such an influence of others’ thoughts, which could lead them to rate the films they watch in a dishonest manner.

Statements 8, 10, 11, and 12: “I think about what other users will think about me after seeing a rating/review I gave/wrote for a film,” “I feel that I will be judged by other users because of a rating/review I give/write for a film,” “I judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their favorite films section,” and “I judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their opinions on a certain film.”

These statements were adapted from several participants’ statements during the interviews in Turgut’s study (2024). One of the interviewees stated: “I hesitate a little bit when I write reviews on Letterboxd (...) Because after all, there are people you follow there too, who see your reviews, who know you. I feel like they would say: “Oh, they watched this film and this is what they understood?” Again, I feel this kind of a social media-like pressure” (Turgut, 2024, p.267). This response led me to write the statements 8 and 10, as I wanted to see if one could make a generalization about Letterboxd users actually embodying this kind of a worry about how they will be perceived by other users.

Another participant stated: “I discriminate against people badly, based on their Letterboxd profiles. If you’ve seen a quality movie and there are a lot of quality movies on your profile, that person is a little bit more prominent for me and I feel a little bit smaller next to them.” I found this response important for the formation of this thesis as the participant makes a self-commentary and indicates that even though they feel insecure when compared to some other users, they discriminate against other users, too. This two-way explanation led me to come up with the statements from a two-sided point of view. I wanted to find out whether Letterboxd users worry about what others may think about them based on their taste in film, and if they do, I wanted to see if they judge or criticize other people based on their tastes as well.

Statement 9: “I find myself needing to belong to a certain cinephile community while using Letterboxd.”

This statement emerged based on data-driven insights made on Twitter (now called X), where some Letterboxd users expressed their idea of being a cinephile, and their efforts to be able to get into the cinephile community. A public account on Twitter (now called X) wrote: “I started this cinephilia thing too late, people watched 3000 movies at my age. It’s like gymnastics, if you don’t start at an early age, you’ll never progress” (Figure 10).

Figure 10. A Screenshot of a Tweet on Twitter (now called X)



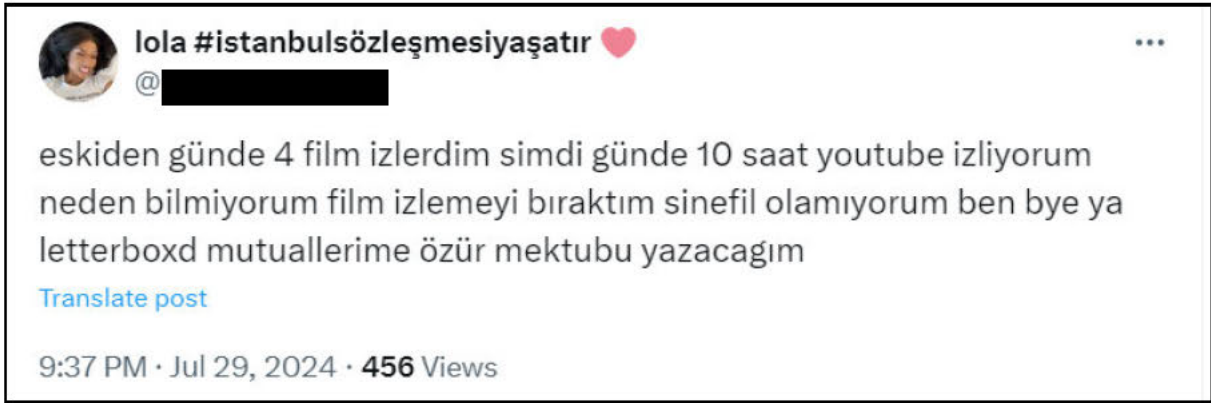
Another public Twitter account wrote: “I’ll open a movie on MUBI, and after the movie is over, I’ll read the reviews on Letterboxd to understand the movie. It’s hard trying to be a cinephile, girls” (Figure 11).

Figure 11. A Screenshot of a Tweet on Twitter (now called X)



Another public account on Twitter wrote: “I used to watch 4 movies a day, now I watch 10 hours of YouTube a day. I don’t know why, I stopped watching movies, I can’t be a cinephile, bye. I will write an apology letter to my Letterboxd mutuals” (Figure 12).

Figure 12. A Screenshot of a Tweet on Twitter (now called X)



These social media posts were an inspiration for this statement of this study to be included in the set of questions. Although all of these expressions were written in a witty tone, I thought it was still a significant topic to explore, as I find it important to understand if there is a certain pressure of cinephilia on Letterboxd users, and whether being a cinephile actually matters to people who use Letterboxd.

Statements 14 and 15: “After I’ve watched a film, I read about what other users on the platform wrote about that film,” and “I think that Letterboxd offers a variety of perspectives regarding people’s reviews and criticisms about films.”

These statements were adapted from two interview questions in Turgut’s study (2024), which are, “How effective do you think using Letterboxd is for discovering new films?” and “While reviewing films using Letterboxd, do you find it helpful to read other users’ reviews?” In the context of this thesis, these two interview questions were adjusted into two statements for the participants to rate on a Likert scale. The reason why I wanted these two statements to be included in the set of statements was because I wanted to understand if Letterboxd helps the channeling of cinephilia in the digital age as an online platform, and if Letterboxd users think the

platform offers an abundance of perspectives that is sufficient to sustain the cinephile tradition in today's world.

3.4. Use of Surveys for Media Psychology Research

In this study, the chosen research methodology had to be one that could convey the participants' feelings, thoughts, and attitudes in the most accurate way possible.

There were several research methods that can be used in media psychology research.

Since this thesis aims to explore the user psychology of Letterboxd users, it was important that the chosen type of method was able to offer the participants several options regarding how they feel about a given statement in the survey. DeVellis (2017) writes about several types of scales and response formats, including Likert scale, semantic differential, visual analog, and such.

Likert scaling is widely used in instruments measuring opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. It is often useful for these statements to be fairly (though not extremely) strong when used in a Likert format. Presumably, the moderation of opinion is expressed in the choice of response option. (DeVellis, 2017, p.121)

Besides DeVellis, McGrath (1995) also writes about research methods in the fields of behavioral and social sciences. He states:

...self-report measures (questionnaires, interviews, rating scales, and the like) are a direct way, and sometimes the only apparent way, to get evidence about certain kinds of variables that are worthy of study: attitudes, feelings, memories, perceptions, anticipations, goals, values, and the like. (McGrath, 1995, p.154)

This study aims to grasp exactly what self-report measures, specifically the Likert scale, offer to researchers. As for the beginning of the survey, in order to be able to measure the participants' eligibility, they were asked their age, gender –to see if the gender element was a determinant in this study– their education level and the

university they were enrolled in. After these basic information questions, they were asked 2 open-ended questions related to their use of the platform. Afterward, with the use of the Likert scale in the survey of this study, the participants were given 15 statements that began with phrases such as “I feel,” “I think,” and “I believe.” Below these statements, they were given a 5-point scale: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. The range in the scale was sufficiently varied for the participants to express the intensity of their thoughts on a specific statement.

3.5. Data Collection and Survey Sample

Hinkin (1995) highlights the importance of the sample-choosing process. He states “...the sample chosen, which should be representative of the population that the researcher will be studying in the future and to which results will be generalized” (Hinkin, 1995, p. 971). The participants for this study were between the ages 18 and 25, and they were either undergraduate or graduate students from several different universities in Turkey and outside of Turkey who used Letterboxd actively for at least 1 year. “...in designing a study to examine the psychometric properties of a new measure it should be made clear why a specific sample was chosen” (Hinkin 1995, p. 974). The reason why this specific criterion about this study’s sample is set in the first place was firstly because my main concern is the young users. I believe that the changes in their ways of film consumption and the process of them being opinionated in terms of cinema are more significant than any other age group since they have a higher chance to transfer this new understanding of cinephilia to the upcoming generations. The reason why I wanted them to use Letterboxd for at least one year is explicitly that I wanted to eliminate the new users who did not spend enough time on the platform to develop new watching habits and motives and a new

understanding of spectatorship.

To analyze the changes in users' viewing practices based on the length of time they have been using the platform, I chose to employ a cross-tab analysis method. This approach allowed for the comparison of variables, being the number of years users have been active on the platform, and the changes they observe in their film consumption habits. The cross-tab analysis was conducted using Excel's Pivot Table function, which enabled me to see the potential correlation between these variables by displaying the frequencies in a structured table format. The use of this method provided insights regarding the users who have longer engagement with Letterboxd demonstrate different behavioral patterns compared to newer users.

The chosen research design does not require the publicity of participants' identities. In the framework of this study, the participants have given consent for the collection of their answers as they are the necessary data for this study. The participants are anonymous, and therefore, their personal data will not be shared with anyone. The consent forms confirm their consent for the researcher to access the data they have provided. There were no ethical, physical, or psychological hazards found in the survey, and it was accepted by The Ethics Committee of Bilkent University on the 7th of May, 2024 (see Appendix A). The consent forms ensure that the participants' personal data was only collected with their consent, and the privacy of the information they provided was guaranteed. The surveys were conducted online and were sent to participants through Bilkent University's BAIS (Bilkent Administrative Information System) email system shared with all currently enrolled students and through Instagram and Twitter, reshared and retweeted through these platforms, and thus, reached the students from other universities as well, between the dates of 20th

and 30th of May, 2024 (see Appendix B).

The informed consent at the beginning of the survey noted that the participants must be between the ages of 18 and 25 and that if they were students at Bilkent University, they should not be currently taking a course from Assoc. Prof. Emel Özdora. They were informed that the study was on a voluntary basis and that they could withdraw from the study without facing any consequences. Undergraduate students who attended Bilkent University and were eligible for taking course credit were informed at the beginning of the survey that they should enter their Bilkent University Student ID number in order to receive course credit.

The survey reached 520 participants through Bilkent University's BAIS (Bilkent Administrative Information System) and social media platforms. 217 participants were eliminated from the study due to several reasons such as their age being over 25, use of Letterboxd being shorter than the predetermined 1-year time period, not using Letterboxd at all, and only participating in the study for course credit purposes. 303 participants were left after the data-cleaning process.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

4.1. Changing Viewing Experience and Motivations of Letterboxd Users

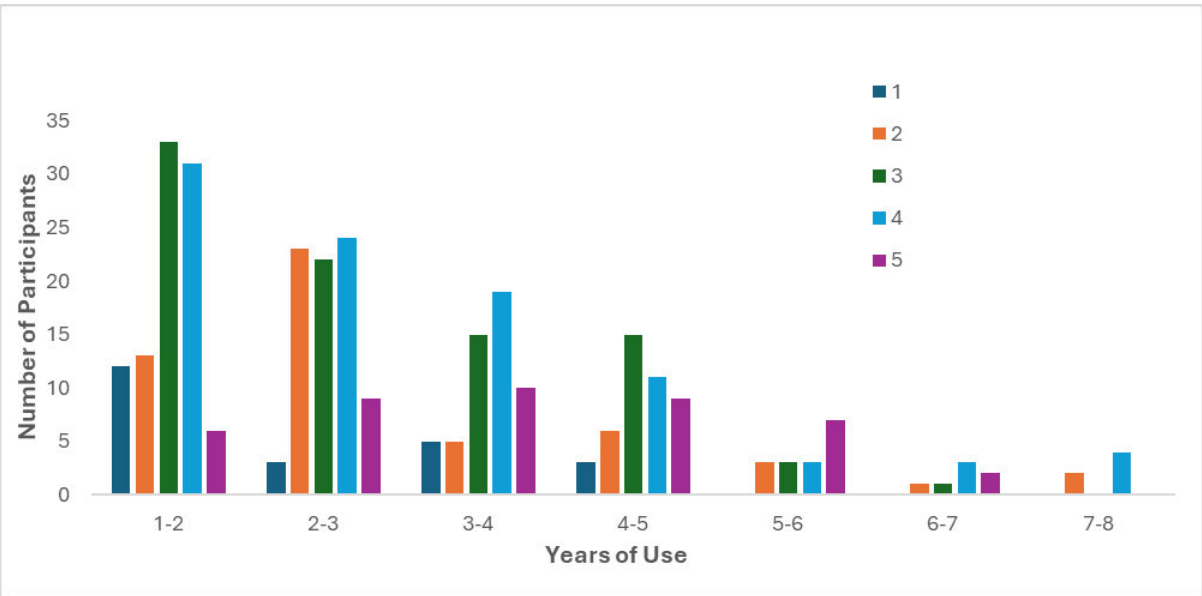
The first research question of this study asked: *How does the use of Letterboxd shape the viewing experience and motivations of its users?* To address this question on a further level, the study proposed two sub-research questions: First, *How is the viewing experience of Letterboxd users affected by the use of the platform?* Second, *How are the viewing motivations of Letterboxd users affected by the structure of the platform?* To come up with answers to these questions, the participants were provided with five different statements to rate according to the Likert scale, which are respectively “I feel that the way I watch films has changed since I started using Letterboxd,” “I think about how I will rate a film as I am watching the film,” “I think about what review I will write for a film as I am watching the film,” “If I hadn’t used Letterboxd, I doubt I would have watched as many movies as I do today,” and “I find myself watching films just for the sake of logging them on my Letterboxd diary.”

The analysis of the first statement provided, “I feel that the way I watch films has changed since I started using Letterboxd,” suggested that 45.6 percent of Letterboxd users felt that the way they watch films has changed since they started using Letterboxd. In addition, 25.1 percent of the participants felt that the way they watch films has not been affected by their use of Letterboxd, while another 29.4 percent of the participants were neutral regarding this subject. This result asserts that most of the participants seem to experience moderate to strong changes in their film-watching

habits, with the majority responding to the scale at levels of 3 and 4. As the analysis established that most of the Letterboxd users do feel a change in their viewing experience and connect this shift with their use of the platform, this suggests that Letterboxd does play a role in users' watching practices, though it establishes more of a general shift, as the statement does not refer to a specific change.

The cross-tabulation analysis suggested that the longer users engage with the platform, the more moderate their responses become. This implies that while the Letterboxd users who are newer to the platform feel a stronger impact, long-term users may have already adapted their habits in time, and thus, they observe fewer changes over time.

Figure 13. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I feel that the way I watch films has changed since I started using Letterboxd.”

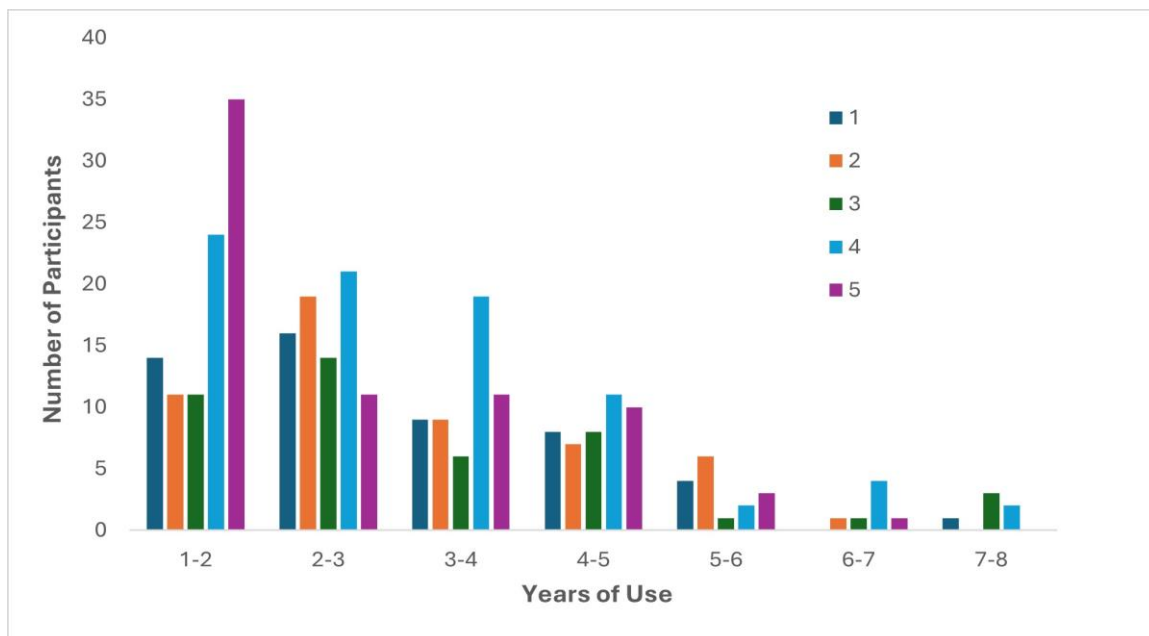


The results of the second statement, “I think about how I will rate a film as I am watching the film,” established that 50.8 percent of Letterboxd users think about how they will rate a film during the viewing experience. 34.7 percent of the participants did not develop this

habit as Letterboxd users, and they disagreed with the statement. 14.5 percent of the users were neutral regarding this subject. This suggests that Letterboxd has clearly shaped the watching practices of its users, adding a new layer of thought to their viewing experience. This proves that the audiences who use Letterboxd watch films from a different mental state in the digital age, which damages the ultimate narrative entertainment experience. This result establishes that rating films on Letterboxd is a true concern for the users, which offers a new aspect in the field of spectatorship and/or audience studies.

The cross-tabulation analysis indicates that the Letterboxd users who are new to the platform are most likely to think about how they will rate a film during viewing, as indicated by strong agreement. As users spend more time on Letterboxd, moderate agreement seems to be a more common response, according to the data of the 3-4 year range showing the highest level of moderate engagement. The users who have 5 and more years of usage of the platform provided more mixed responses, but the chart shows that some long-term users still think about how they will rate a film during the viewing experience, though this behavior shows itself on a lesser degree compared to newer users.

Figure 14. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I think about how I will rate a film as I am watching the film.”

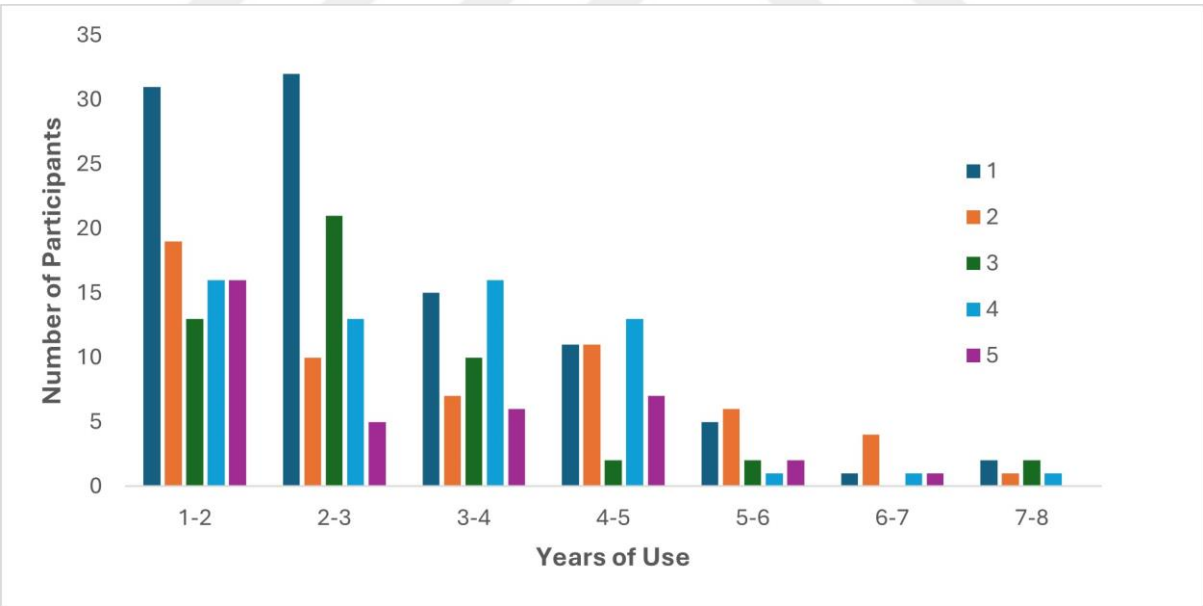


The analysis of the third statement, “I think about what review I will write about a film as I am watching the film,” revealed that more than half of Letterboxd users (51.1 percent) do not think about the review they are going to write for a film during the viewing experience, whereas 32.3 percent of the participants asserted that they developed this habit as Letterboxd users. 16.5 percent of the participants were neutral regarding this subject. Although not a majority, a significant number of Letterboxd users (32.3 percent) indicated that they do think about what review to write for the film during the act of watching. This suggests that even though the majority of Letterboxd users do not think about what review they will write for the film during the viewing experience, this is not an irrelevant habit development as 32.3 percent of the users do feel this way. This result establishes that there is an apparent change in the way Letterboxd users watch films, though most of them care more about the star-rating system compared to the review system. Ultimately, the users do observe the development of new watching habits, but these habits display themselves

through different features of the platform, depending on the user’s preference.

The cross-tabulation analysis establishes that the Letterboxd users who are new to the platform (1-3 years) are more likely to disagree with the idea of thinking about what review they will write for a film during the watching experience. The users who have been active on the platform longer (3-5 years) provided more varied responses, with a higher percentage leaning towards agreement. The analysis indicates that newer users are less likely to think about what review they will write during a viewing experience, while the users with more experience on Letterboxd tend to think about that more, but the opinions are still varied and do not indicate a strongly dominant level of agreement.

Figure 15. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I think about what review I will write about a film as I am watching the film.”

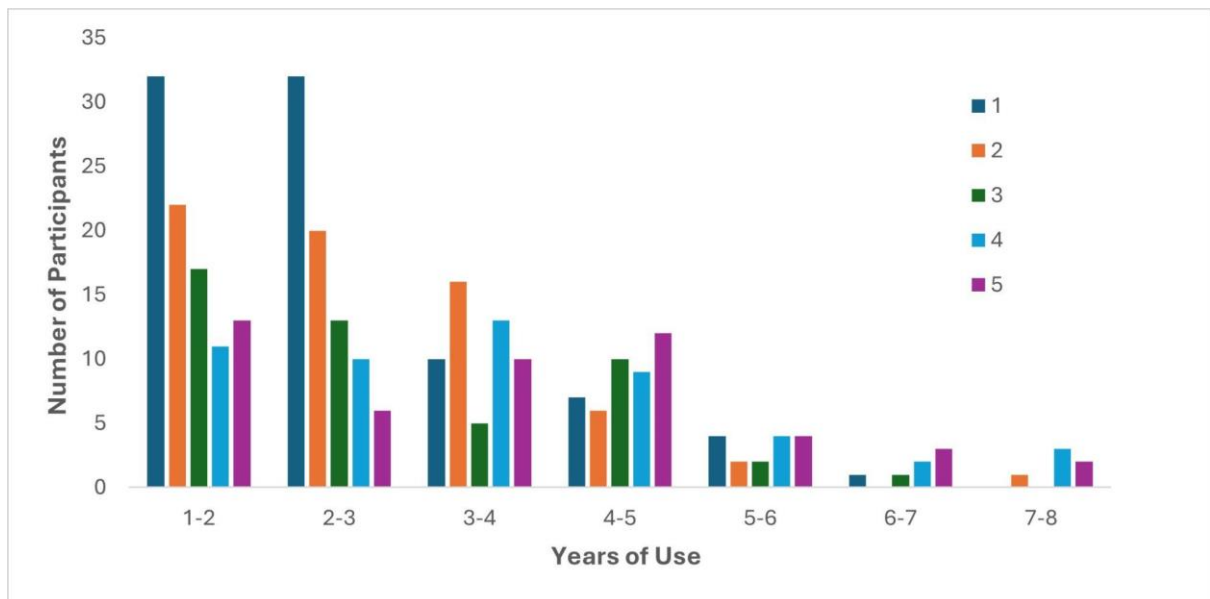


The analysis of the fourth statement, “If I hadn’t used Letterboxd, I doubt I would have watched as many films as I do today,” revealed that 50.5 percent of Letterboxd users think that Letterboxd is not a motivation for them to watch more films, while 33.7 percent of the

participants stated that they would not have watched as many films as they do today if they hadn't used Letterboxd. 15.8 percent of the participants were neutral regarding this subject. This suggests that Letterboxd users watch films because they want to, not because they feel the need of proving themselves to other users on the platform. They do not relate to a feeling of competition on Letterboxd. However, the statement is still not totally irrelevant, as 33.7 percent of the users indicated that they would not watch so many films if it were not for their use of Letterboxd. Ultimately, Letterboxd is not a source of motivation for its users to watch more films, but there is still a minority that thinks of Letterboxd as a motivation to engage more in viewing activities.

The cross-tabulation analysis indicates that the Letterboxd users who are new to the platform do not think that Letterboxd is a motivation for them to watch more films. As users spend more time on Letterboxd, moderate agreement on this subject seems to be a more common response, according to the data of the 4-5 year range showing the highest level of moderate engagement. The users who have 5 and more years of usage of the platform, however, believe that the reason they watch this many films is related to their use of the platform. Ultimately, this mindset is more relevant to users who have been engaged with Letterboxd for a longer period of time, compared to the newer users.

Figure 16. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “If I hadn’t used Letterboxd, I doubt I would have watched as many films as I do today.”

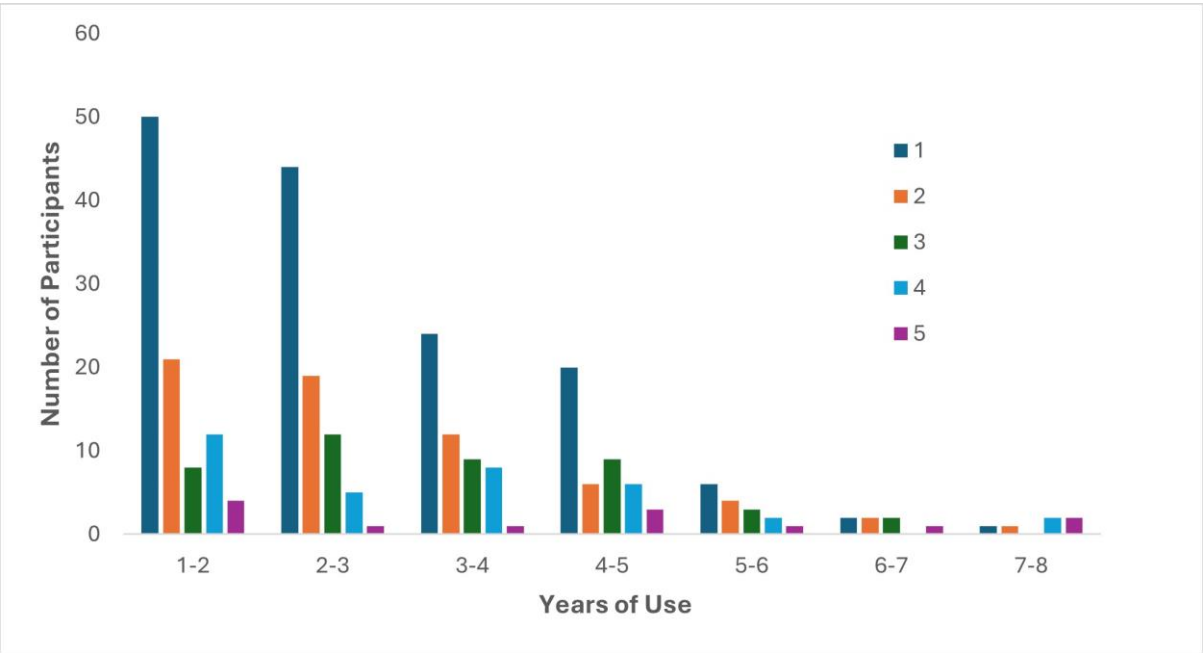


For the fifth statement, “I find myself watching films just for the sake of logging them on my Letterboxd diary,” and the last statement that is meant to help this study to answer the first research question in general, 70 percent of the participants stated that they do not watch films for the sake of logging them on their Letterboxd diaries. 15.9 percent of the users asserted that they do, and 14.2 percent of the users were neutral regarding this subject. The analysis established that a great majority of Letterboxd users do not find a correlation between their motivation of watching films and displaying their experience on Letterboxd. This suggests that the statement was highly irrelevant, as only 15.9 percent of the users were able to relate to it. There were no significant links found between the audiences’ use of the diary entry option on Letterboxd and their motivation to watch films.

The cross-tabulation analysis suggests that the long-term Letterboxd users display less of a disagreement with this statement, indicating that the diary entry option on Letterboxd can be occasionally the only reason they watch films. As for the users

who are new to the platform, there is a strong disagreement regarding this statement, meaning that newer users (1-5) do not embody a worry regarding the display of their diary entries on the platform.

Figure 17. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I find myself watching films just for the sake of logging them on my Letterboxd diary.”



4.2. Do Other People’s Opinions Actually Matter?

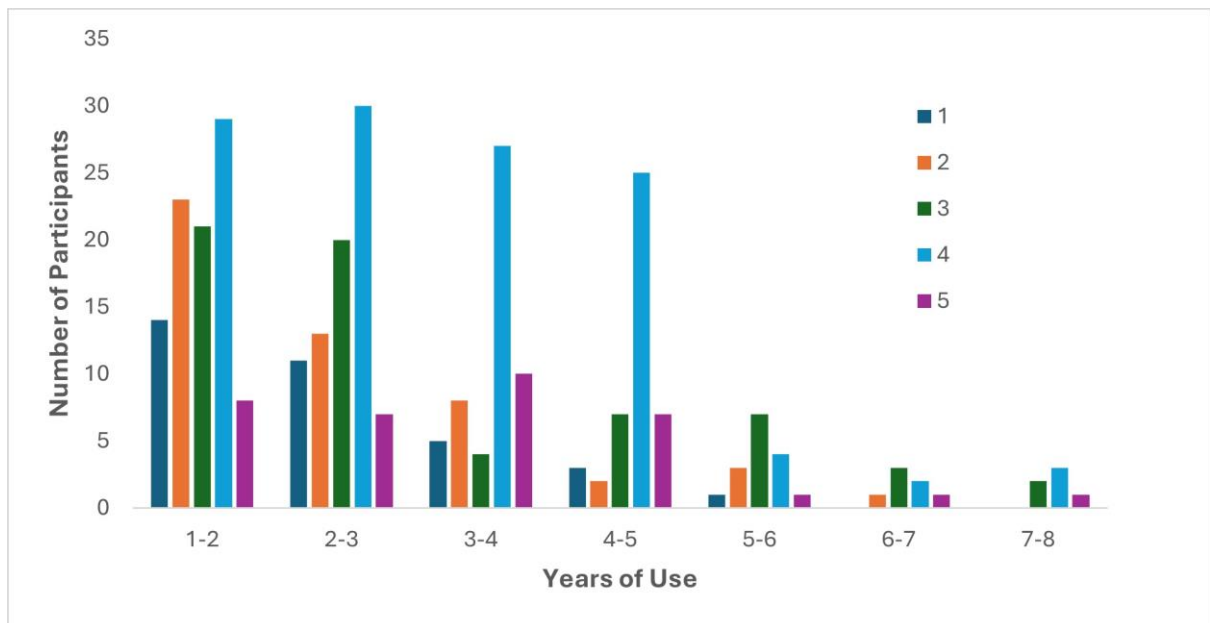
The second research question of this study was: *To what extent do the other users’ opinions on Letterboxd impact the users in terms of rating and reviewing certain films in an honest manner?* To be able to answer this question on a deeper level of understanding, the study proposed a sub-research question: *To what extent is the impact of other users’ opinions on Letterboxd users are correlated with their need to belong to a cinephile community?* To find answers to these questions, the participants were asked to rate four different statements to rate according to the Likert scale, which are “I feel the impact of other users’ ratings while rating a film,” “I feel that I am not being completely honest

while rating a film,” “I think about what other users will think about me after seeing a rating/review I gave/wrote for a film,” and “I find myself needing to belong to a certain cinephile community while using Letterboxd.”

For the sixth statement, “I feel the impact of other users’ ratings while rating a film,” 51.2 percent of the participants confirmed that they feel the impact of other users’ ratings while rating a film. 27.7 percent of the users stated that they do not feel such an influence, and 21.1 of the participants were neutral regarding this subject. The analysis revealed that most of the Letterboxd users feel that other users’ opinions impact their own opinions regarding a film. This finding suggests that Letterboxd users are affected by other people’s opinions about certain films, and thus, that their ratings tend to be biased.

The cross-tabulation analysis suggests that regardless of the years of use, Letterboxd users certainly feel the impact of other users’ ratings while rating a film. While comparatively newer users (1-5 years) distinctively agree with this statement, mostly rating the statement on the degree 4, the case for the older users of the platform (5-8) displays itself in more of a moderate agreement in terms of the participants’ common response ranging from the levels of 3 to 4. Ultimately, the participant observe this influence of others’ opinions on their own ratings regardless of the years of use, the newer users agree more strongly with this statement compared to the older ones.

Figure 18. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I feel the impact of other users’ ratings while rating a film.”

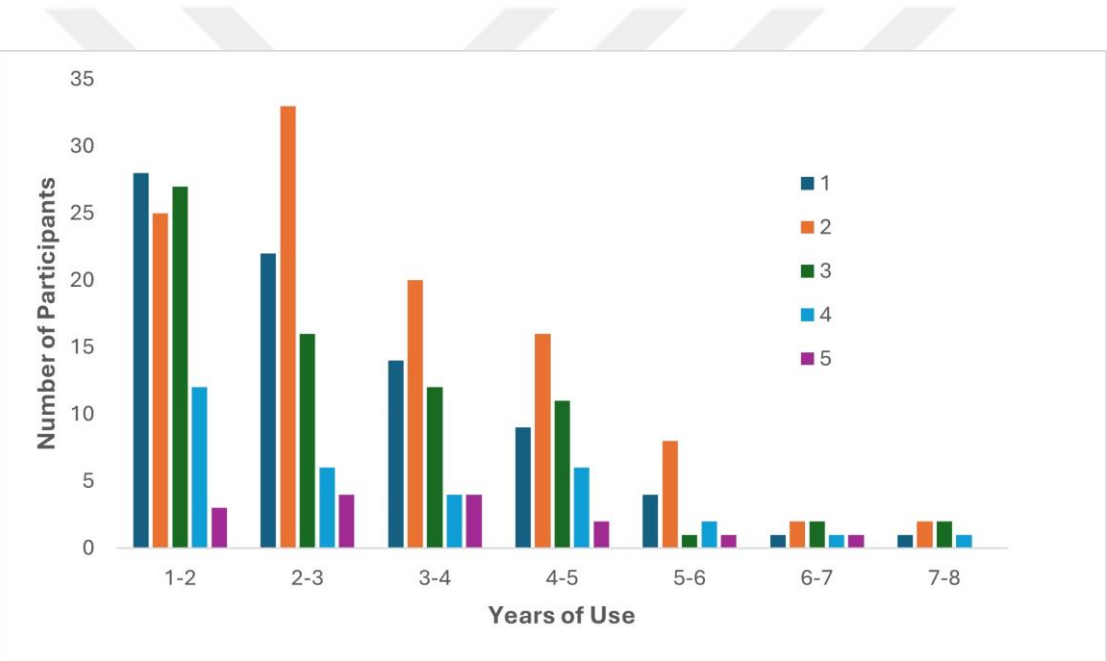


According to the analysis of the seventh statement, “I feel that I am not being completely honest while rating a film,” 61.1 percent of the participants felt that they were being completely honest while rating a film on Letterboxd. 15.6 percent of the users suggested that their ratings were not completely honest, and 23.4 percent of the participants were neutral regarding this subject. The analysis revealed that a majority of the Letterboxd users feel that they are being completely honest while rating a film on Letterboxd. This finding suggests that Letterboxd users, even though their opinions might be affected by other people, feel that they rate films in an honest manner, which can denote a contradiction with the previous statement.

The cross-tabulation analysis suggests that the users who have been on Letterboxd for 1-2 years feel that they are rating films in an honest manner, as there is a strong concentration of responses in the “strongly disagree” category in the chart. As users continue using the

platform more (2-4 years), there is a sense of moderate dishonesty or uncertainty about their honesty, as the common response of this group is around the levels of 2 and 3. After 4-5 years of use, users tend to have more of a neutral stance about their level of honesty, and there is no clear conclusion that the analyzed data of this group of longer-term users suggests.

Figure 19. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I feel that I am not being completely honest while rating a film.”



According to the answers of the eighth statement, “I think about what other users will think about me after seeing a rating/review I gave/wrote for a film,” 50.5 percent of the users stated that they do not think about what other users will think about them after seeing a rating/review they gave/wrote for a film. 32.3 percent of the participants were worried about what other users would think about them, and 17.2 percent of the users were neutral regarding this subject. The analysis established that more than half of Letterboxd users do not care about what other users will think of them and their taste in

films. This suggests that the factors of social acceptance and need-to-belong do not dominantly display themselves in Letterboxd users' engagement with the platform.

However, the statement is not completely irrelevant, as one-third of the platform's users do feel worried about what others will think about them.

According to the cross-tabulation analysis, the users who are relatively new on Letterboxd (1-2 years) think about what other users will think of them based on their taste in films.

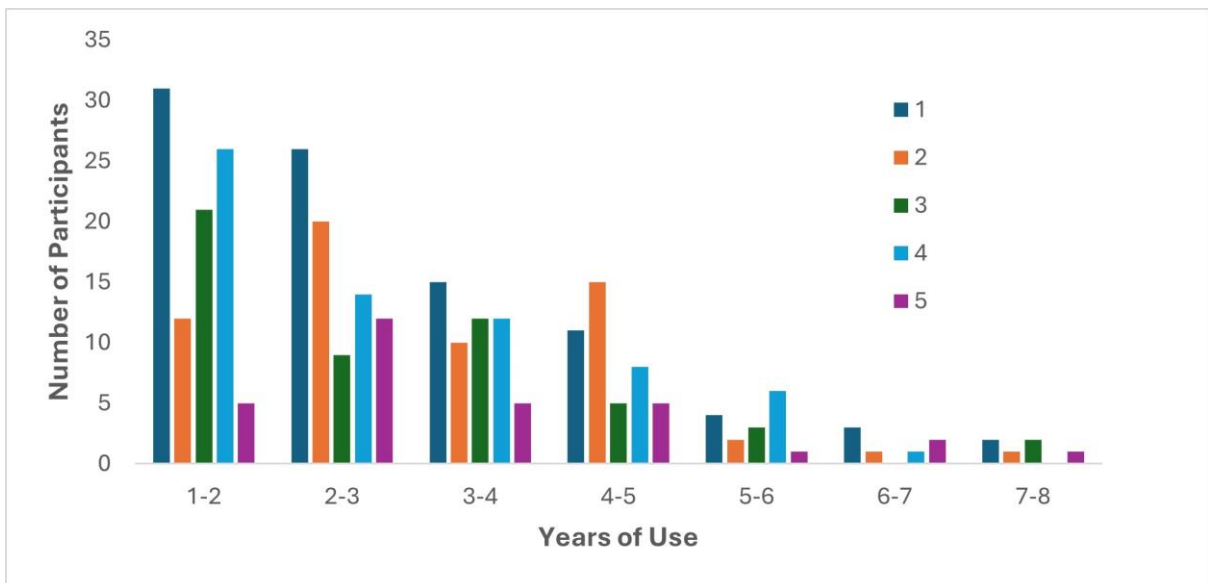
Although there is a strong concentration of responses in the "strongly disagree" category in the 1-2 years group, the level of "strongly disagree" are quite close to the level of 4, which stands for the word "agree." As users continue using the platform more (2-4 years), there is a decrease in this worry, as the chart keeps displaying a strong concentration on "strongly disagree" and the amount of people who agree with this statement diminishes.

After 4-5 years of use, users tend to have more of a neutral stance about this subject.

However, despite this neutrality, the common response ranges from the levels of 1 to 3.

Ultimately, regardless of the years of use, the users do not think about what other users will think about them after they see a rating/review they gave/wrote for a certain film.

Figure 20. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I think about what other users will think about me after seeing a rating/review I gave/wrote for a film.”

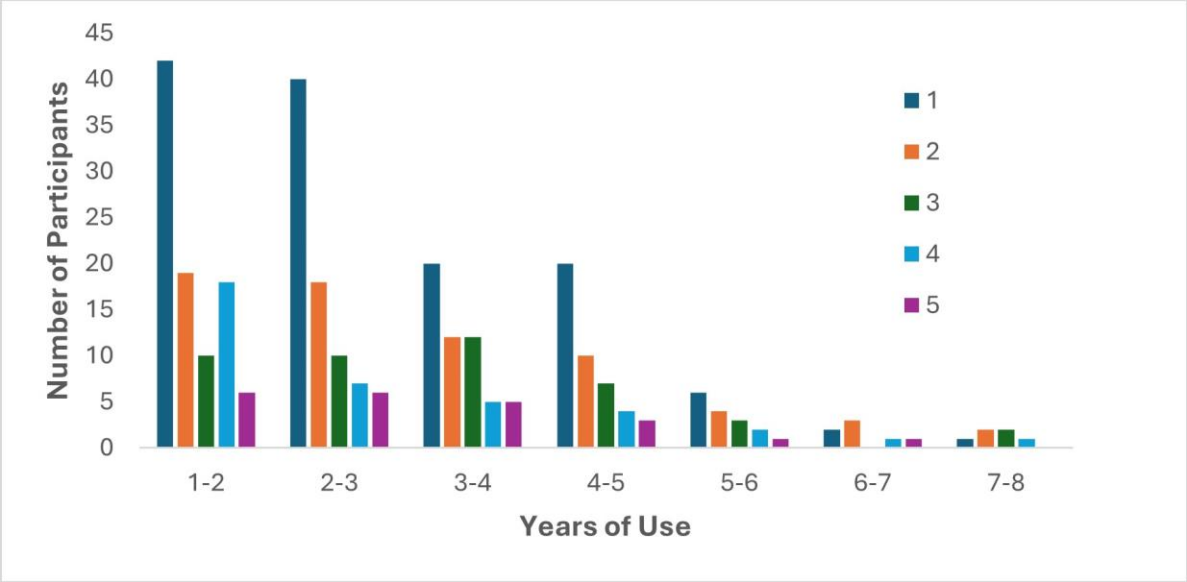


For the ninth statement, “I find myself needing to belong to a certain cinephile community while using Letterboxd,” 65.6 percent of the users stated that they do not feel a need to belong to a certain cinephile community while using Letterboxd. 19.8 percent of the participants asserted that they do feel this need. 14.5 percent of the users were neutral regarding this subject. The analysis revealed that a great majority of Letterboxd users do not relate to this statement, as they do not necessarily feel a need to belong to a cinephile community. This result shows that the Letterboxd users do not necessarily feel as if they are part of an online community while using Letterboxd, and they do not feel the need for it, meaning that their use of Letterboxd is highly individualistic.

According to the cross-tabulation analysis, although there is a common sense of strong disagreement on the group of newer users (1-2 years), they are also the only group that shows a relatively strong sense of agreement on their need to belong to a cinephile community. As users continue using the platform more, there is a strong decrease in this

need to belong, as the chart keeps displaying a strong concentration on “strongly disagree” between the years 3 and 5. After 5 years of use, the highlight on the strong disagreement decreases, which implies that the long-term users start to free themselves from this worry of need-to-belong over the years. Ultimately, the most strong agreement about the need-to-belong displays itself in the first two years of engagement with the Letterboxd platform, and this worry apparently disappears over time.

Figure 21. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I find myself needing to belong to a certain cinephile community while using Letterboxd.”



4.3. A New Understanding of Cinephilia in the Digital Age

The third research question of this study was: “*How does Letterboxd contribute to the transformation of the understanding of cinephilia in the digital age?*” In order to find answers to this question, the participants of the study were asked to rate ten different statements, including two statements from the previous research question, which are “I think about what other users will think about me after seeing a rating/review I gave/wrote for a film,” and “I find myself needing to belong to a certain cinephile community.”

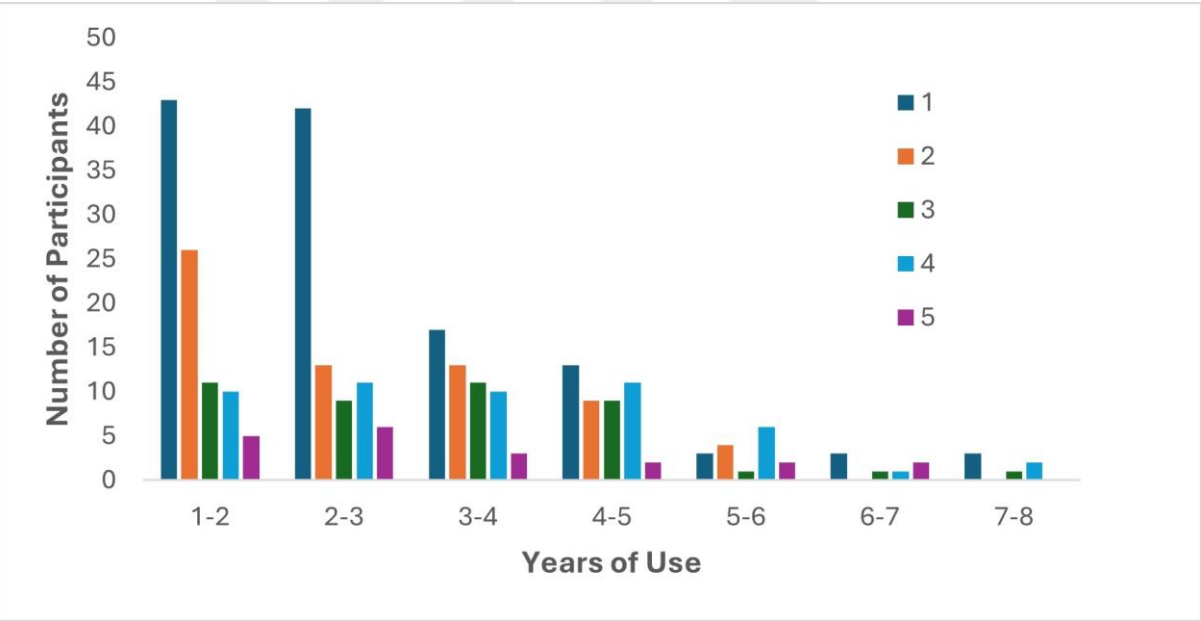
The eighth and ninth statements, “I think about what other users will think about me after seeing a rating/review I gave/wrote for a film,” and “I find myself needing to belong to a certain cinephile community while using Letterboxd,” that were given to answer the previous research question also apply for answering the last research question of this thesis. As the results of those two statements were already analyzed in the previous sub-chapter, from the next paragraph on, the interpretation will continue with the analysis of the tenth statement. The other statements that will be analyzed in this sub-chapter are, “I feel that I will be judged by other users because of a rating/review I give/write for a film,” “I judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their favorite films section,” “I judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their opinions on a certain film,” “I find myself competing with certain users in terms of how many films I’ve watched compared to them,” “After I’ve watched a film, I read about what other users on the platform wrote about that film,” and “I think that Letterboxd offers a variety of perspectives regarding people’s reviews and criticisms about films.”

According to the analysis of the tenth statement, “I feel that I will be judged by other users because of a rating/review I give/write for a film,” 62.4 percent of the Letterboxd users do not feel that they will be judged by other users because of their thoughts regarding films. 23.4 percent of the participants stated that they do feel this way, while 14.2 percent of the users were neutral regarding this subject. This suggests that, supported by the previous analyses, the Letterboxd users display unconcerned behavior in terms of how they are perceived by others.

According to the cross-tabulation analysis, while the gap between the levels of “strongly disagree” and “agree” is broader in the groups of newer members of the platform (1-3 years) the gap starts to wane as the users continue using the platform more. After 3 years, the degrees of disagreement and agreement appear to be on similar levels for the users,

and the answers display more of a moderate stance compared to the data of the newer users. Between 5 and 6 years of use, the feeling of being judged by others becomes more dominant for the users. However, it was observed that after 6 years, the level of agreement shows a decrease again, and the common sense of the users seems to be on the degree of 1. Ultimately, the most strong agreement about the feeling of being judged by others displays itself in the first two years of engagement with the Letterboxd platform, but there is no clear conclusion that the analyzed data of the group of longer-term users suggests.

Figure 22. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I feel that I will be judged by other users because of a rating/review I give/write for a film.”

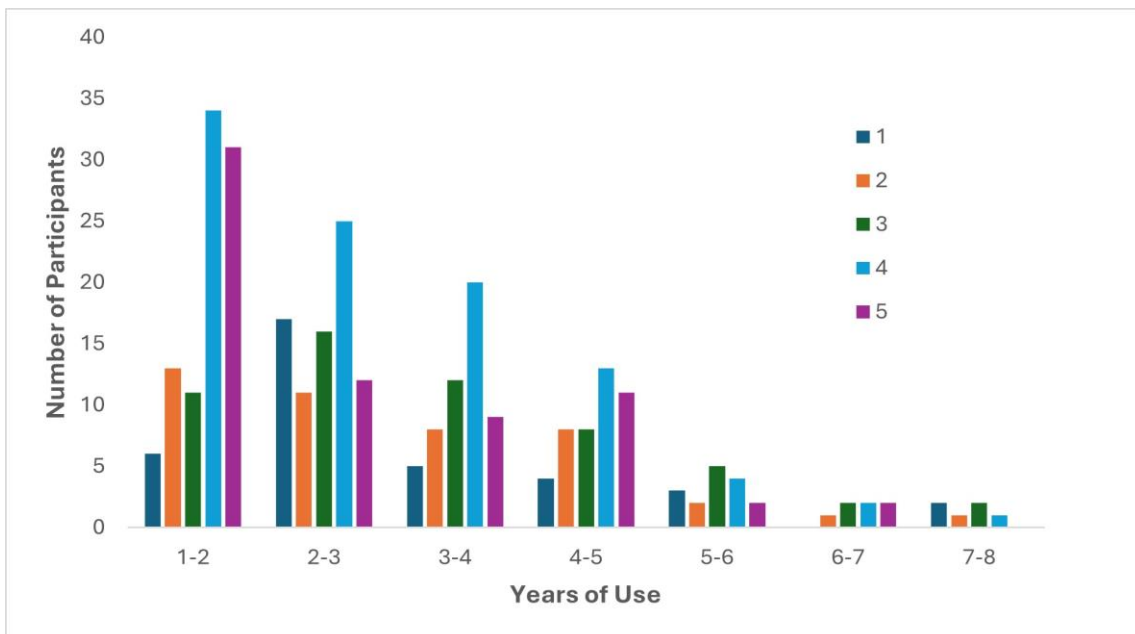


According to the analysis of the eleventh statement that was provided for the users, “I judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their favorite films section,” 54.8 percent of the participants judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their favorite films section on their profiles. 26.7 percent of the users stated that they do not judge or criticize others, and 18.5 percent of the participants were neutral regarding this

subject. This suggests that, even though Letterboxd users do not think that they will be judged by others because of their film tastes, they do criticize others based on their tastes. However, the behavior of judging and criticizing is usually expected to appear reciprocally in people, meaning that if users do observe this behavior in themselves, it would be reasonable to expect them to act according to it, as it is highly possible that the same behavior will be exhibited towards them. The results indicate that this behavior is exhibited one-sided, and Letterboxd users do not display any significant concern about how they will be perceived by others through their favorite films section, which constitutes their online identity on the platform.

The cross-tabulation analysis shows that there is a common sense of agreement about this statement regardless of the years of use factor. While the gap between the levels of disagreement and agreement is broader in the groups of newer members of the platform (1-4 years), the gap shows a decrease as the users continue using the platform more. After 5 years, the same degrees appear to be on similar levels for the users, and the answers display more of a moderate stance compared to the data of the newer users. Between 5 and 6 years of use, the users' judgment towards others slightly decreases, as a more neutral stance is highlighted on the chart. becomes more dominant for the users. It can be observed that after 6 years, the common sense appears to be around the degrees of 3 and 4. Ultimately, the most strong agreement about the judgment towards others regarding their favorite films section displays itself in the first four years of engagement with the Letterboxd platform, but there is no clear conclusion that the analyzed data of the group of longer-term users suggests, as the rated degrees on the chart become more similar to each other over the years.

Figure 23. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their favorite films section.”

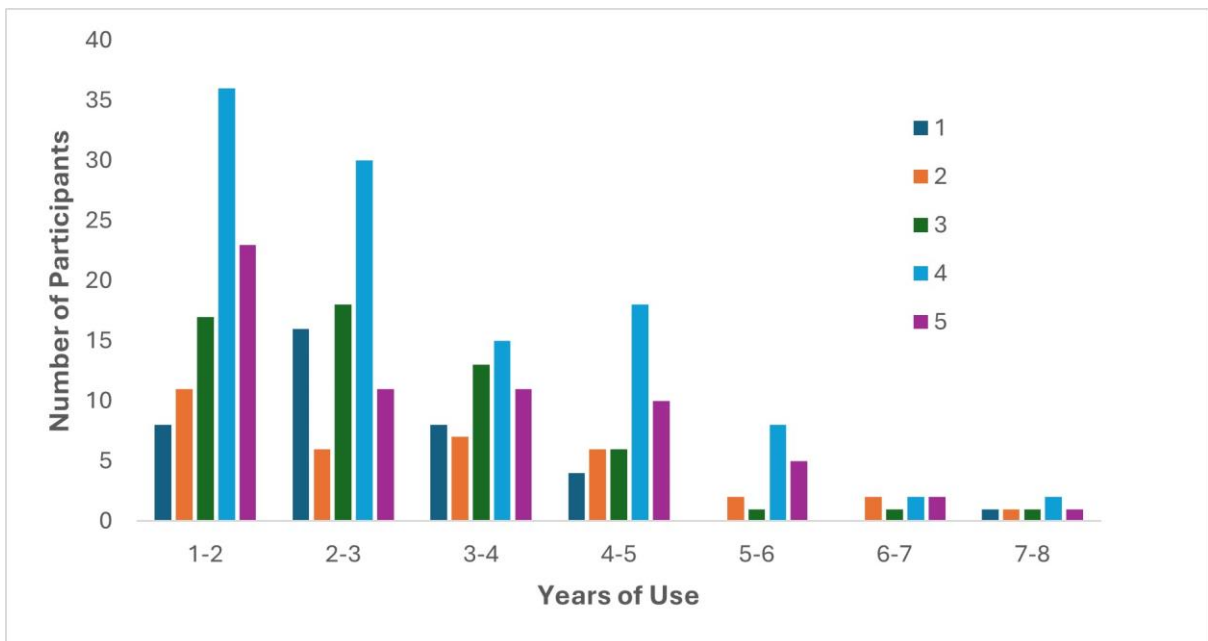


57.4 percent of the users asserted that they judge or criticize other Letterboxd users based on their opinions on certain films, according to the participants’ ratings on the twelfth statement, “I judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their opinions on a certain film.” 23.8 percent of the users stated that they do not judge or criticize others, and 18.8 percent of the participants were neutral regarding this subject. The analysis revealed that more than half of the Letterboxd users do judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their opinions on films. The interpretation of this result is similar to the previous one, as the outcome suggests that Letterboxd users do judge other users based on their ideas, ratings, reviews, and opinions on films. The possibility of the exhibition of this behavior occurring one-sided is considered to be uncommon, especially if we connect this situation to Goffman’s (1959) theory about performances and audiences. Although the previous results showed that the users utilize Letterboxd in an individualistic manner, it is controversial for them to state that they judge and criticize other users based on their

tastes and opinions. This behavior is expected to occur in a community-setting, which is why Goffman's idea of performances and audiences works on bilateral levels. Ultimately, the results are considered to be controversial.

The cross-tabulation analysis shows that there is a common sense of agreement about this statement regardless of the years of use factor, just like the analysis of the previous statement. None of the years of use groups display any concentration on the disagreement, meaning that the length of time does not necessarily play a significant role in terms of users' judgment towards each other, neither in terms of the favorite films section, nor the opinions on a certain film. While the gap between the levels of disagreement and agreement is broader in the groups of newer members of the platform (1-4 years), the gap shows a significant decrease as the users continue using the platform more. After approximately 6 years of use, the common sense seems to have more of a neutralistic tone, but the disagreement stance never gets ahead of the agreement levels. Ultimately, the most strong agreement about the judgment towards others regarding their opinions on films displays itself in the first two years of engagement with the Letterboxd platform, but there is no clear conclusion that the analyzed data of the group of longer-term users suggests, as the rated degrees on the chart become more similar to each other over the years, and the gap between the stances disappears.

Figure 24. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I judge or criticize other users on Letterboxd based on their opinions on a certain film.”

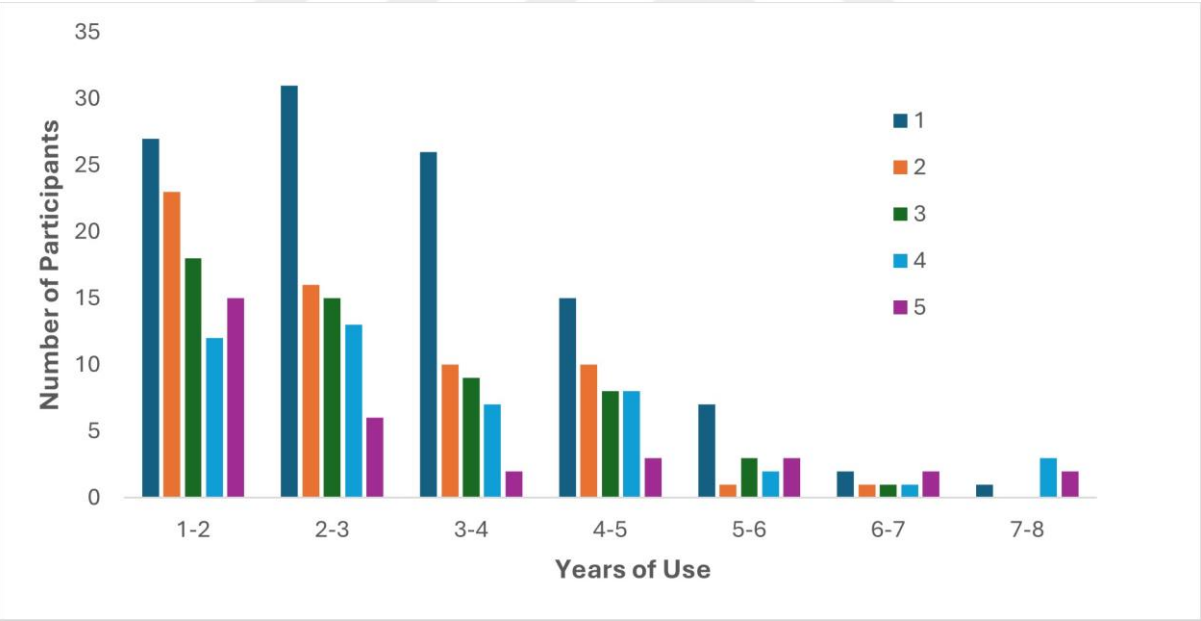


According to the results of the thirteenth statement, “I find myself competing with certain users in terms of how many films I’ve watched compared to them,” 56.1 percent of Letterboxd users do not compete with other users in terms of how many films they have watched compared to them. 26.1 percent of the users asserted that they do, and 17.8 percent of the participants were neutral regarding this subject. The analysis revealed that more than half of the Letterboxd users do not relate to this statement, and they do not feel competitive towards other users regarding the amount of films they log on their Letterboxd diaries. Although a small percent asserted that they do feel competitive on the platform, this is still an uncommon behavior to observe for the majority of Letterboxd users.

According to the cross-tabulation analysis, despite how in almost every year group the disagreement stance is on the rise, the behavior of competition with other users are mostly observed throughout the first two years on the platform. After 2 years, the stance that

participants take starts to become more moderate, as the common response of the following groups is around the levels of 2, 3, and 4. This could suggest that the feeling of competition between the users fades over time. However, the 7-8 year gap group shows an actual agreement with the statement, and this part of the data analysis makes it challenging to draw such a conclusion regarding the competitiveness disappearing over time, as there is no consistent increase or decrease flow on the chart that can be observed over the years. Ultimately, there is no clear conclusion that the analyzed data of the long-term group can suggest.

Figure 25. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I find myself competing with certain users in terms of how many films I’ve watched compared to them.”

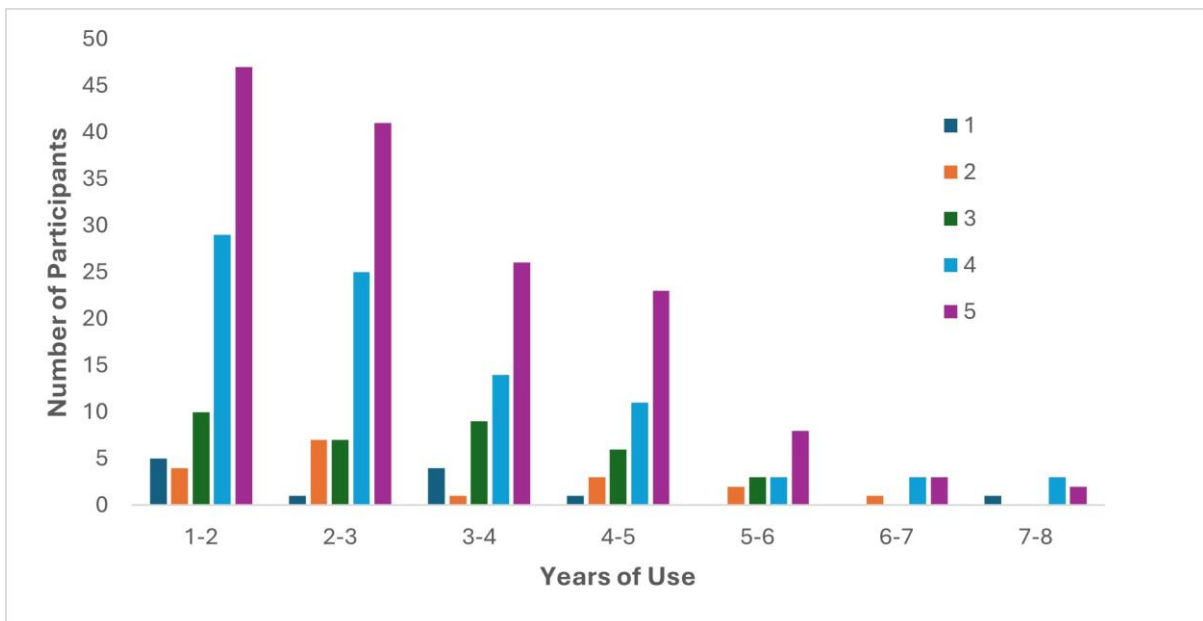


According to the answers of the fourteenth statement, “After I’ve watched a film, I read about what other users on the platform wrote about that film,” 78.5 percent of the participants read other users' reviews on the platform after they had watched a film. 9.9 percent of the users did not read the reviews other users wrote. 11.6 percent of the

participants were neutral regarding this subject. The results revealed that a great majority of Letterboxd users, after watching a film, do read other users' reviews and thoughts about that certain film. As this is a very high percentage, this suggests that Letterboxd users do use the platform effectively and cinephilia continues to transform and channel through the platform in the digital age, as the users care about each others' opinions and are open to discussions about films.

According to the cross-tabulation analysis, there is a common sense of agreement with this statement, indicating that the users, regardless of how new or old they are on the platform, find other people's opinions on films valuable. The degree of agreement seems to be strongly highlighted in every year gap group, which means that Letterboxd continues to serve as an online space for the cinephiles of the contemporary age, and the users actively engage with the ongoing discussions on the platform, and are curious about what other people on Letterboxd think about films in general.

Figure 26. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “After I’ve watched a film, I read about what other users on the platform wrote about that film.”

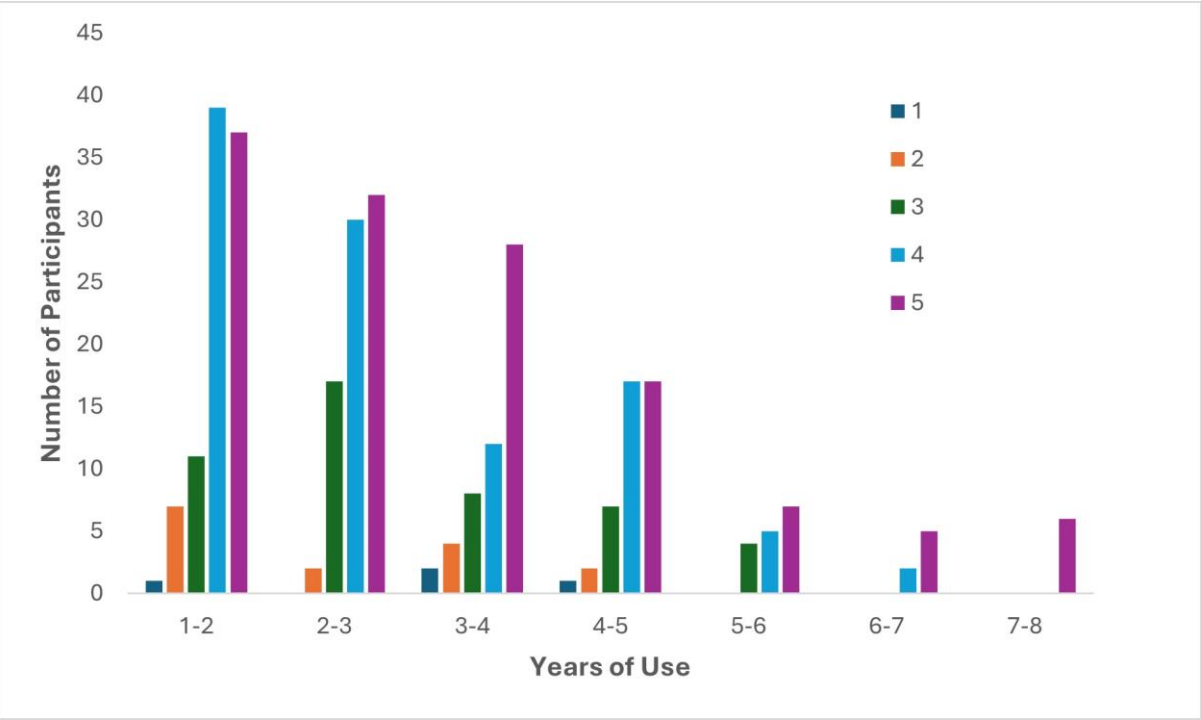


The answers of the fifteenth statement, “I think that Letterboxd offers a variety of perspectives regarding people’s reviews and criticisms about films,” revealed that 78.3 percent of the participants think that Letterboxd offers a variety of perspectives regarding people’s reviews and criticisms of films, while 6.3 percent think that the platform does not offer such variety. 15.5 percent of the participants were neutral regarding this subject. The results show us that a great majority of the participants think that Letterboxd offers a variety of voices and opinions. This suggests that Letterboxd stands for a dynamic virtual space for the cinephiles of the contemporary age. The platform certainly contributes to the transformation of cinephilia in the digital age positively, and serves as an important space for cinephiles.

The cross-tabulation analysis shows that there is a common sense of agreement about this statement regardless of the years of use factor, just like the previous statement. The results indicate that most users trust Letterboxd in terms of how it manages to offer a range of

perspectives, and they feel like the platform is nourishing, considering that they care about other users’ opinions about films, and they are satisfied with the range of perspectives they can access through the platform.

Figure 27. Cross-Tabulation Analysis: “I think that Letterboxd offers a variety of perspectives regarding people’s reviews and criticisms about films.”



CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As Letterboxd continues to grow as an outstanding platform for film enthusiasts around the world, it impacts users' viewing practices and shapes how these users curate and present their cinematic tastes to the other users on the platform. Though film consumption patterns are widely studied in audience and media studies, existing research is limited in exploring how platforms like Letterboxd influence people's film consumption habits and how these changing habits relate to their self-presentation within such platforms. This is of course a natural gap in the existing literature, since the platform has only gained this amount of attention among cinephiles in the last couple of years. Taking this gap into account, this study aimed to explore how Letterboxd users' viewing practices are influenced by their desire to assert a certain cinephile persona on Letterboxd and construct a particular identity within the cinephile community. Considering the impact of years of use as a factor, this study also aimed to examine whether the user behavior on the platform display a shift depending on the length of users' engagement with the platform. This study focused on understanding how Letterboxd users' film watching habits are changing in relation to their use of Letterboxd over the years, the users' online identity construction on the platform, and what this platform actually means for the channeling and transformation of cinephilia in the digital age. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of this study, its theoretical implications and comparisons with the existing literature, the limitations of the study, and offer new steps for future research.

5.1. Key Findings of the Study

5.1.1. Changing Film Watching Habits and Motivations

The findings of the study indicated that the use of Letterboxd creates a considerable change in the way that users watch films, and it was observed that this change in people's watching habits is at peak in users who are newer to the platform. The users of the platform who have been using the platform for longer observed fewer changes on their watching habits, which can indicate that the strongest impact of Letterboxd on its users can be observed in the first few years of use of the platform.

One of the significant changes that was observed in Letterboxd users' watching habits was the act of simultaneously thinking about how to rate a film during the act of watching the film, which means another mental layer is added to the experience of viewing. This behavior is most likely to be seen in newer users, and the assertion of this behavior decreases as the users engage for longer periods of time with the platform.

While it was established that the users' level of care about the ratings is significant, the review option on the platform is not as often used and does not create a that significant of a worry on Letterboxd users compared to the rating option on the platform. It was found out that the ratings matter more for the users than reviews. However, unlike the previous correlations, it was demonstrated that the longer users engage with the platform, the more they start to care about what reviews they will write about the films they watch. This direct contrast between the rating and reviewing habits can indicate that Letterboxd users care more about how to write a film criticism and express their thoughts on films in general as they get more familiar with Letterboxd culture. Meanwhile, the matter of rating a film loses its significance over time, as of reviewing increases.

It was also found out that Letterboxd was not a motivation for its users to watch more

films. However, when the issue was explored in terms of the length of use, it was observed that for the users who have been on the platform longer, there was an increase on Letterboxd encouraging its users to watch more films. The participants also demonstrated that they do not watch films only for the sake of logging them on their Letterboxd diary. They indicated that displaying the films they watch on the platform is not a source of motivation to watch more films for them. The statement was partly relevant for the users who have been on the platform for a longer time, compared to the newer members, but there was no observation of a significant change in between the years of use. This indicates that although the majority of Letterboxd users did not feel as the platform motivates them to engage more in film consumption, the platform has this influence on users who have been on the platform for a longer time. And yet, this influence is not related to the idea of sharing what they have watched recently with other users on Letterboxd, meaning that the users do not place significant importance on self-presentation on the platform.

5.1.2. The Influence of Others' Opinions on What Letterboxd Users Think About Films

The findings indicate that the users of Letterboxd feel that they are influenced by other users' opinions while rating a film, meaning that they have a hard time staying objective regarding their opinions on a certain film, which involves both their actual thoughts regarding a film and what they display on the platform. The analysis did not show a significant change regarding this behavior of Letterboxd users that depends on the length of their use of the platform. However, it was observed that there was a stronger agreement on this statement in the group of newer users compared to the older ones, though the differences observed were not drastic. This finding aligns with the existing research on the role of social comparison in people's own thoughts. The users tend to adjust their

behavior based on the cinephile community, which is why they feel pressure to some degree to conform to community norms.

A controversial finding of this study was the discrepancy between two statements that are connected to each others' factuality. While the users agreed that they were influenced by other people's opinions while rating a film on the platform, they strongly disagreed about asserting dishonest behavior while rating films on the platform. The analysis regarding the years of use did not display a significant difference, but only slight changes in the level of agreement in long-term users' answers. However, as the participants have already declared that their own opinions regarding films were impacted by other users, their common disagreement on their "dishonesty" offers a contradiction with their answers to the previous statement. This could indicate that while Letterboxd users are aware of external influences, they do not believe that this is a compromise about their authenticity. The users believe, or want to believe, that their final rating is their own even if it is shaped or influenced by external factors, being other people's ratings.

Continuing with the social comparison factor, the study revealed that the majority of Letterboxd users do not embody a significant amount of worry about how they will be perceived by other users on the platform based on their tastes in films. As they declared that they do not think about others' judgment based on their relationship with cinema, it was found out that this worry displays itself mostly on the newer users, though it is observed on minor degrees and not the majority, and it decreases over the years as users engage more with the platform.

As socializing and being a member of a community are important factors in the consideration of user behavior on online platforms, the study tried to understand if Letterboxd stands for a cinephile community in the eyes of its users. The findings

revealed that users engage with the platform in an individualistic manner rather than a community-based mindset. The majority of the participants declared that they do not feel a need to belong to a cinephile community while using Letterboxd. The need-to-belong factor only displayed itself, though in minor degrees, in the newer users' category. As the users engage more with Letterboxd, the sense of community shows a decrease over time, and people's use of the platform turns into more of an individualistic practice.

5.1.3. What Letterboxd Means for Cinephile Culture in the Digital Age

This study aimed to understand Letterboxd's place in contemporary cinephilia, as the results of Turgut's research (2019) on Letterboxd had implications regarding Letterboxd offering its users a competitive space rather than a nurturing culture. The ultimate concern about what Letterboxd stands for in terms of cinephilia in the contemporary age was that the platform led people to assert behaviors of social comparison, judgment, and competitiveness. It was one of the goals of this thesis to understand whether Letterboxd transformed cinephilia into a hierarchical culture or not. The reason why this was an expected outcome was because Letterboxd is considered an extension of social media, which means that its structure can enable its users to assert social media-like behavior patterns, which can eventually be associated with what cinephilia means in the contemporary age.

The findings indicate that Letterboxd users do not embody a significant worry of being judged because of their film tastes in the platform, and it was found out this worry shows itself in newer users of the platform, though on smaller degrees, and that it fades away as the years of use increase. However, the users asserted that even though they do not observe such a fear of judgment on the platform, they do judge and criticize other users based on their favorite film section on their platform and tastes in films in general. This is

another controversial outcome of this study, and I believe that it could be interpreted through Goffman's theory (1959) of self-presentation. This finding could mean that Letterboxd users do feel secure and confident about their self-presentation on the platform, as they try to curate their favorite films section and their opinions in a way that aligns with the cinephile norms.

This confidence could result in their concerns about being judged by others to decrease. However, the results show that they still do judge and criticize other users on the platform, as Letterboxd offers a nature that enables and encourages social comparison within the platform. The results based on the years of use seem rational, as it is expected for newer users to need time to adapt to the norms on the platform, and they naturally might feel more vulnerable to the new community they become a part of. Over time, more experienced users start to have less concerns about how they will be perceived on the platform, as they become more confident with their tastes and embrace their tastes which construct their online identities on the platform. The users also stated that they do not compete with other users while using Letterboxd, and this behavior of competition only displays itself in newer users, though in smaller degrees. Thus, it was found out that Letterboxd either does not offer a competitive nature to its users, or that this feeling of competition fades over time and mostly the newer users feel this way. Again, this is related to how newer users try to adapt to a new online platform, and they occasionally feel the need to prove themselves to the other users on Letterboxd. As the users keep engaging with the platform over the years, such competitive behaviors were not a concern anymore.

Last but not least, this study also found out that Letterboxd users do engage with others on the platform, as they stated that they read about what other people on the platform wrote about films, and they find the atmosphere of Letterboxd nurturing in terms of the variety

of opinions the platform offers. However, previous results indicated that users' Letterboxd practices tended to be more individualistic, and they did not necessarily feel as they are part of a community. This discrepancy could mean that the users find a balance between their personal reflections and social experiences. Although they seem to appreciate how Letterboxd enables them to build their own online cinephile identities and express their tastes, they are also curious about different perspectives, meaning how other users interpret the content they engage with, which could result in them getting validation or experience a challenge on their own point of views. The reason why users do enjoy engaging with other users is most probably because the variety of opinions serve as a form of self-validation or help them add different layers to their own interpretations of the movies they watch. While users enjoy the opportunity of expressing their individual opinions, they also see a kind of a benefit in engaging with other users' opinions. This does not mean, however, that they feel like they belong to a cinephile community. The other users' opinions only serve as a way to validate or challenge their own opinions regarding films.

5.2. Theoretical Implications and Comparison with Literature

The results of the study support Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, which is the overarching theory of this study, and they also partly extend it as I tried to adjust the theory into a digital space. According to Goffman's theory, people put on certain performances to control how they are perceived by others. The findings of the study supported this behavior, as Letterboxd users do construct online identities through their profiles and display of their film tastes that conform with cinephile norms. However, the participants of the study asserted that they do not embody a significant worry regarding what other people think about them based on their film tastes. The study also established that the occurrence of this worry was displayed in newer users' statistics,

meaning that the feeling disappears over time as users get more comfortable in their online identities that they have curated on the platform.

The controversial outcomes regarding the authenticity of the users do in fact support Goffman's theory of front-stage and back-stage (1959), as the users do confess that they are influenced by other people's thoughts in the first place. The fact that they still believe they are being honest while stating their opinions regarding films on Letterboxd shows that they tend to subconsciously adjust this behavior and still think they are being authentic. The users fall into the trap Goffman talks about in his theory, which is the confusion between the act and the reality. There is always a chance that "the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality" (Goffman, 1959, p.17).

The part where I believe extends and expands Goffman's ultimate theory is about the community setting element. The findings align with Goffman's theory regarding people's engagement with self-presentation and performance on the platform. It was found out that Letterboxd users do work on identity management and eventually put on performances for their imagined and/or unknown audience, as they curate their profiles with the awareness of the fact that they are being perceived by others. The outcome of Letterboxd not standing for a community for its users, but how the users still feel the need to put on a performance, adds a different perspective to Goffman's theory. It turns out that the act of self-presentation does not necessarily occur in a social community setting that people feel the need-to-belong to. As the users engage with a global and broader audience on Letterboxd, it is naturally more challenging to maintain a community feeling on the platform. However, the study shows that the idea of self-presentation Goffman talks about is still relevant in digital spaces, even when they are individualistic spaces rather than social communities.

The findings of this study were partially aligned with the supporting theory of the thesis, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (Jenkins, 1992/2005). Jenkins' idea of fandom turning into a participatory culture was not directly supported by the case of Letterboxd. Although Letterboxd does create a participatory culture and plays a part in transforming what cinephilia means in the digital age, it does not necessarily contribute to the channeling of cinephilia, due to the lack of a sense of community within the platform. "The transformation of media consumption into the production of a new culture and a new community" (p.46) does not fully display itself in the case of Letterboxd. Letterboxd is indeed where it is today because of the members' activity on the platform and the platform's increasing popularity. The platform is active on the streets, in prestigious film festivals, interviewing people and learning about their favorite films, trying to increase the popularity of Letterboxd (Figures 16 and 17). The participants of the study declared that they think about how they will rate a film during the act of watching, and the reason they developed this habit through their use of Letterboxd is because they care about their own self-image on the platform, but they do not necessarily care about the cinephile culture that is channeled through the platform. Their use of the platform is turned out to be highly individualistic, which is the contrary of Jenkins' idea of fan communities. It was found out that Letterboxd users do not focus on collective identity, being fandom in Jenkins' terms. This is the key difference between the participatory culture Jenkins discusses and the Letterboxd culture.

Figure 28. A Screenshot of an Instagram post by [at]letterboxd, during an interview with Monica Bellucci about her four favorite films.

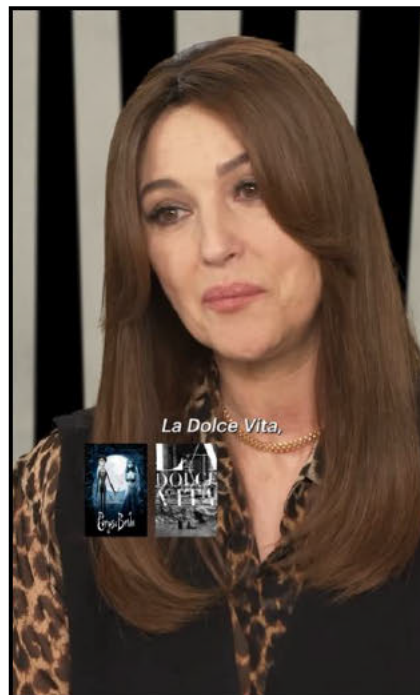


Figure 29. A Screenshot of an Instagram post by [at]letterboxd, asking random people on the streets about their four favorite films.



As Letterboxd is an online space that enables social comparison between the members, the users' most significant concern is their self-presentation on the platform, meaning that they care more about the curation of their individual online identities, rather than community building. However, this does not show a correlation between the need-to-belong to a cinephile community, as they do not look at Letterboxd as a community that they are a member of. Also, the users display the behaviors of judgment and criticism towards other users, which is definitely not a nurturing culture when thought of in terms of a community setting. Letterboxd is perceived as a social media platform, and not necessarily a channel of cinephilia for the users. In general, the conclusion of the outcomes of this study does not mean that Jenkins' theory was not supported, but rather that the theory was irrelevant to this study, as Letterboxd did not stand for an online community for its users in the first place.

The findings are not consistent with the studies of Wohn & Na (2011) and Cohen & Lancaster (2014) as well, which can be found in the literature review chapter. Wohn and Na's (2011) research explored the use of social media during the act of watching as a pseudo "group viewing" experience, and they found out that the reason why viewers want to be engaged with multiple screens is that they want to be part of a larger group (p.10). Cohen and Lancaster also found that people's need to belong was an important motivating factor behind using social media during the act of viewing (2014, p.516). However, the outcomes of these studies do not align with this study's findings, as the users do not feel a need to belong to a larger group during their use of Letterboxd.

One of the statements that were given to the participants of this study was, "I feel the impact of other users' ratings while rating a film," and the majority of the participants

(51.2 percent) agreed with this statement, which is a result that is consistent with the research of Winter et al. (2018). They found that viewers were highly influenced by other people's opinions about a certain viewing material (p.33) and what they think about a certain TV show was shaped by others' thoughts and opinions (p.35). As the users of Letterboxd expressed that they feel the impact of other users' opinions, too, this thesis' outcomes align with the results of Winter et al. (2018) study.

The results of this study differ from Turgut's research (2024), which was the main research I used in the literature review chapter of this study that specifically explored the user experience of Letterboxd. Before explaining the differences in our studies' outcomes, I find it important to highlight the differences between our studies that look quite similar to each other. Firstly, Turgut's research emphasizes on Letterboxd's role in reshaping cinematic perceptions of Letterboxd users and highlights the innovations that Letterboxd introduces in terms of film discovery and users' engagement with film. His focus is highly on the behavioral shifts of Letterboxd users. The behavioral shifts of Letterboxd users only constitutes a small part of this research. This research was more interested in Letterboxd users' self-presentation on the platform and how this impacts the cinephile culture in the contemporary age, while also aiming to understand the behavioral changes it may cause in users. Turgut's work was more concerned about the platform as a tool for film discovery and its cultural significance, while this thesis' concern is how users are influenced by and act according to cinephile norms, and how this issue of self-presentation shapes the transformation of cinephilia in the digital age.

Turgut's research (2024) suggested that the users of the platform show an occasional behavior of watching films only for the sake of logging them to their diaries, and that they

feel inadequate because of a social comparison behavior they exhibit, in terms of the number of films they watch compared to the other users on the platform (Turgut, 2024). The participants of his research declared that Letterboxd changes the motivations behind consuming cinematic content (Turgut, 2024, p.268). The results of Turgut's study were directly opposite of the findings of this research. The participants declared that logging films on their Letterboxd diaries was definitely not a motivation for watching more films. Majority of the users did not relate to the statement about the comparison and competition behavior as well. This strong difference and the discrepancy can be attributed to the differences between the designs of our research. If this research were to be conducted using an in-depth interview method, the results would likely suggest different interpretations.

5.3. Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is its relatively small sample size. While it can offer a variety of perspectives required for an MA thesis, it might not provide an adequate number of participants for coming to an accurate conclusion regarding who Letterboxd users are and how they use the platform. Moreover, the majority of participants were either Turkish, or located in Turkey, so the survey did not manage to reach outside of the country, which causes a limitation in terms of diversity of participants and their demographics. Future research should aim to use a larger and more diverse sample to achieve more precise findings.

The study also relies heavily on self-reported data because of the survey design. This factor affects the accuracy of the data and the dependability of the responses, as the

possibility of different biases should be considered. As the participants were not physically observed while rating the statements they were provided through a survey, it is not certain that they expressed their true thoughts and behaviors. One of the main goals of the research design was to be able to create the comfort of a “backstage” for the participants, according to Goffman’s (1959) terminology, to be able to get the most accurate results. It was expected by the participants to be honest about the user behavior they exhibit on Letterboxd. The discrepancies of the outcomes can be attributed to the lack of providing a backstage for the participants, which means the design of the research, that is, an online survey. If this study were to be conducted in the form of an interview, with focus groups, in a manner of a friendly in-depth conversation between the participants and the researcher, I believe that the results would be different, and the participants could be more willing to open up about how they use the platform and what behaviors they observe themselves displaying.

Another limitation of the study was the fact that it did not observe the community interactions on the platform in a literal sense and was interested in self-reported data in terms of the method of observation, which could be the reason of why Jenkins’ (1992/2005) theory of participatory culture was not fully supported. Future studies could take a netnographic approach directly focus on the interactions between Letterboxd users on the platform and arrive at more comprehensive conclusions.

Future research could aim to use a method that has a psychological approach, and this topic could be further explored by the psychology scholars who work in related fields to media psychology. A similar study from a psychology perspective could provide more objective data. Furthermore, the research focuses on quantitative data. Future studies

could support this research by integrating qualitative components such as open-ended questions, focus groups or in-depth interviews to collect detailed data on personal accounts of Letterboxd use. The fields of psychology and media studies can build on this study by addressing these limitations to provide more reliable and nuanced understanding of the user psychology of Letterboxd.

5.4. Concluding Remarks

This study explores the impact of Letterboxd on its users' film watching habits and motivations, the user behavior on the platform, and their engagement with cinephilia in the digital age. The research questions of the study were curated to examine users' shaping viewing practices and forces, their authenticity when it comes to forming opinions about films on the platform, and what the platform stands for in contemporary cinephile culture. This section aims to emphasize the broader implications of this study's findings.

This research established that while Letterboxd provides users a digital space for engaging with film discussion, it simultaneously alters the ultimate viewing experience of its users. It was found out that users constantly contemplate how they will rate the films they watch during the viewing experience, which adds a performative layer to their engagement with cinema. This demonstrates that Letterboxd is not solely a space that serves as a host for discussions, but it also plays an important role in shaping the way users consume film content, which was an important insight in terms of digital cinephilia.

Another significant outcome of this study was regarding users' authenticity. Although the users believe they are honest and staying loyal to their authenticity while sharing their

ratings with others on the platform, the research uncovered a dilemma. It was also found out that Letterboxd users are clearly influenced by other users' opinions and thoughts regarding certain films. This paradox suggests a complex balance between self-presentation and social validation, which is often observed on social media environments.

Additionally, this study established that while Letterboxd is a space that has room for variety of different opinions, Letterboxd users engage with the platform in more of a comparative manner, rather than a communal one. This finding indicates a shift in the new understanding of cinephilia in the contemporary age, having observed it turning into a more self-image focused practice, rather than a collective pursuit as in the traditional sense. These insights suggest that the ultimate digital environment of cinephilia in this age, being Letterboxd, can redefine what it means to be a cinephile in the digital age.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing literature on social media environments and sheds light on the dynamics of Letterboxd user behavior. This research also contributes to the fields of media and film studies through its highlights on the Letterboxd platform's impacts on users' viewing practices and behaviors in online environments. By highlighting the platform's impact on user behavior and the channeling of cinephilia, this research contributes valuable knowledge to the fields of media studies and film studies. The results obtained can offer a foundation for further research and exploration of online communities and user psychology.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, N. (2017). Speed watching, efficiency, and the new temporalities of digital spectatorship. *Compact cinematics: The moving image in the age of bit-sized media*, (pp.103-112).
- Apuke, O. D., & Omar, B. (2021). Fake news and COVID-19: modelling the predictors of fake news sharing among social media users. *Telematics and Informatics*, 56, 101475.
- Behlil, M. (2005). Ravenous Cinephiles: Cinephilia, Internet, and Online Film Communities. In M. de Valck & M. Hagener (Eds.), *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory* (pp. 111–124). Chapter, Amsterdam University Press.
- boyd, d. (2007). Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life. *eBusiness & eCommerce eJournal*.
- Campbell, Z. (2009). On the Political Challenges of the Cinephile Today. *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 50(1/2), 210–213.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41552554>
- Cesar, P., & Geerts, D. (2011). Past, present, and future of social TV: A categorization. Proceedings of Consumer Communications and Networking Conference (CCNC), 347–351. <https://doi.org/10.1109/CCNC.2011.5766487>
- Chang, Yuhmiin. (2016). Why do young people multitask with multiple media? Explicating the relationships among sensation seeking, needs, and media multitasking behavior. *Media Psychology*, 20(4), 685–703.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2016.1247717>

Cohen Elizabeth, L., & Lancaster Alexander, L. (2014b). Individual differences in In-Person and Social Media television coviewing: the role of emotional contagion, need to belong, and coviewing orientation. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 17(8), 512–518.

<https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2013.0484>

Crary, J. (2013). *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*. Verso Books.

De Valck, M. (2010). Reflections on the recent cinephilia debates. *Cinema Journal*, 49(2), 132–139. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.0.0191>

DeVellis, R. F. (2017). *Scale Development: Theory and Applications* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Incorporated.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Anchor Books edition: 1959). Doubleday Anchor Books.

Gorfinkel, E. (2008). Cult Film or Cinephilia by Any Other Name. *Cinéaste*, 34(1), 33–38. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41690730>

Hagener, M. (2016). Cinephilia and Film Culture in the Age of Digital Networks. *The State of Post-Cinema: Tracing the Moving Image in the Age of Digital Dissemination*, 181-194.

Han, E., & Lee, S. (2014). Motivations for the complementary use of text-based media during linear TV viewing: An exploratory study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 32, 235–243. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.12.015>

Hargittai, E., & Walejko, G. (2008). THE PARTICIPATION DIVIDE: Content creation and sharing in the digital age¹. *Information, Communication & Society*, 11(2), 239–256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180801946150>

Highfield, T., Harrington, S., & Bruns, A. (2013). Twitter as a Technology for Audiencing and Fandom: The #Eurovision phenomenon. *Information*,

Communication & Society, 16(3), 315–339.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.756053>

Hinkin, T. R. (1995). A Review of Scale Development Practices in the Study of Organizations. *Journal of Management*, 21(5), 967-988.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639502100509>

Horváth, Á., & Gyenge, B. (2015). Consumption habits regarding movies. *International Journal of Synergy and Research*, 4(2).

Ildir, A. (2024). ‘Disciplining the audience’: Audience experiences with MUBI. *Convergence*, 30(5), 1646-1664.

Jenkins, H. (2005). *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (eBook ed.). Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc. (Original work published 1992)

Jeyanthi, M. (2022). Social Media and Identity Formation–The Influence of Self-Presentation and Social Comparison. *Mind and Society*, 11(02), 138-144.

Jullier, L., & Leveratto, J. (2012). Cinephilia in the digital age. In *Amsterdam University Press eBooks* (pp. 143–154).

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048515059-012>

Keller, S. (2020). *Anxious Cinephilia: Pleasure and Peril at the Movies*. Columbia University Press.

Krämer, N. C., Neubaum, G., Winter, S., Schaewitz, L., Eimler, S. C., & Oliver, M. B. (2019). I feel what they say: the effect of social media comments on viewers’ affective reactions toward elevating online videos. *Media Psychology*, 24(3), 332–358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2019.1692669>

Lee, C. S., Ma, L., & Goh, D. H. L. (2011). Why do people share news in social media?. In *Active Media Technology: 7th International Conference, AMT 2011, Lanzhou, China, September 7-9, 2011. Proceedings 7* (pp. 129-140).

Springer Berlin Heidelberg.

- Lee, E.-J., & Yoon Jae Jang. (2010). What Do Others' Reactions to News on Internet Portal Sites Tell Us? Effects of Presentation Format and Readers' Need for Cognition on Reality Perception. *Communication Research*, 37(6), 825-846. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650210376189>
- Letterboxd. (2021, October 8). Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Letterboxd>
- Liu, H. (2007). Social Network Profiles as Taste Performances. *Journal of Computer-mediated Communication*, 13(1), 252-275.
- Livingstone, S. (1999). New Media, New Audiences? *New Media & Society*, 1(1), 59-66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444899001001010>
- Llinares, D., & Arnold, S. (2015). Introduction: Reframing Cinematic Space and Audience Practice in the Digital Age. *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network*, 8(5).
- Manago, A. M., Graham, M. B., Greenfield, P. M., & Salimkhan, G. (2008). Self-presentation and gender on MySpace. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 29(6), 446-458.
- Marwick, A. E., & boyd, d. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 114-133.
- Mast, G. (1974). What Isn't Cinema? *Critical Inquiry*, 1(2), 373-393. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1342790>
- McWhirter, A. (2016). *Film criticism and digital cultures: Journalism, Social Media and the Democratization of Opinion*. I.B. Tauris.
- Morrison, J. (2005). After the Revolution: On the Fate of Cinephilia. *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 44(3), VIII.
- Möller, A. M., Baumgartner, S. E., Kühne, R., & Peter, J. (2021). Sharing the Fun?

How Social Information Affects Viewers' Video Enjoyment and Video Evaluations. *Human Communication Research*, 47(1), 25–48.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqaa013>.

McGrath, J. E. (1995). Methodology Matters: Doing Research in the Behavioral and Social Sciences. In *Elsevier eBooks* (pp. 152–169).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-08-051574-8.50019-4>

Onat Kocabiyik, O. (2021). Social Media Usage Experiences of Young Adults during the COVID-19 Pandemic through Social Cognitive Approach to Uses and Gratifications. *International Journal of Technology in Education and Science*, 5(3), 447-462.

Schirra, S., Sun, H., & Bentley, F. (2014). Together alone: Motivations for live-tweeting a television series. *Proceedings of the 2014 Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Conference on Computer-Human Interaction (CHI)* (pp. 2441–2450). New York, NY: ACM Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/2556288.2557070>

Shedlosky-Shoemaker, R., Costabile, K. A., DeLuca, H. K., & Arkin, R. M. (2011). The social experience of entertainment media. *Journal of Media Psychology Theories Methods and Applications*, 23(3), 111–121.

<https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000042>

Smith, A., & Boyles, J. L. (2012). The rise of the “connected viewer”. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, 12.

Sontag, S. (1996, February 25). *The Decay of Cinema*. The New York Times Magazine. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/02/25/magazine/the-decay-of-cinema.html>

Stapleton, P., Luiz, G., & Chatwin, H. (2017). Generation validation: The role of social comparison in use of Instagram among emerging adults.

Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 20(3), 142-149.

- Sundar, S. S. (2008b). The MAIN model: A heuristic approach to understanding technology effects on credibility. In M. J. Metzger & A. J. Flanagin (Eds.), *Digital media, youth, and credibility*, pp. 72–100. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Tassew, M. D. (2020). The Relationship between Social Media Usage and Students' Self-esteem among Wolaita Sodo University Students. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 10(9), 62–73.
<https://doi.org/10.29322/ijsrp.10.09.2020.p10510>
- Turgut, O. (2024). Film Keşif Ağlarının İzleme Deneyimi İle İlişkisi: Letterboxd Örneği. *Erciyes İletişim Dergisi*, 11(1), 253-281
<https://doi.org/10.17680/erciyesiletisim.1338828>
- Vidal, B. (2017). Cinephilia Goes Global: Loving cinema in the post-cinematic age. In *The Routledge Companion to World Cinema* (pp. 404–414). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315688251-34>
- Waddell, T. F., & Sundar, S. S. (2017). #thisshowsucks! The Overpowering Influence of Negative Social Media Comments on Television Viewers. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 61(2), 393–409.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2017.1309414>
- Wang, K. (2023). The Impact of social media On Consumer Behavior. *Highlights in Business, Economics and Management*, 23, 1198-1205.
<https://doi.org/10.54097/1ys3cj95>
- Winter, S., Krämer, N. C., Benninghoff, B., & Gallus, C. (2018). Shared entertainment, shared opinions: The influence of social TV comments on the evaluation of talent shows. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 62, 21-37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2017.1402903>.

Wohn, D. Y., & Na, E.-K. (2011). Tweeting about TV: Sharing television viewing experiences via social media message streams. *First Monday*, 16(3).

<https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v16i3.3368>.

Xie, L. (2023). User's motivation in sharing information on social media. *BCP Business & Management*, 43, 153–158.

<https://doi.org/10.54691/bcpbm.v43i.4635>.

Yelpaze, İ. (2021). Determinants of Political Content Sharing on Social Media: Impulsiveness, Social Recognition, Risk-taking, and Collective Opinion.

Journal of Human & Society/İnsan ve Toplum, 11(2).

APPENDICES



Appendix A. Bilkent University Ethics Committee Approval



Bilkent Üniversitesi

Akademik İşler Rektör Yardımcılığı

Tarih : 7 Mayıs 2024
Gönderilen : Deniz Yavuz
Danışman : Emel Özdora
Gönderen : H. Altay Güvenir
İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başkanı
Konu : "Understanding ..." çalışması etik kurul onayı

Üniversitemiz İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu, 7 Mayıs 2024 tarihli görüşme sonucu, "Understanding Letterboxd Users: The Platform's Influence on Film Consumption and Cinephilia" isimli çalışmanız kapsamında yapmayı önerdiğiniz etkinlik için etik onay vermiş bulunmaktadır. Onay, ekte verilmiş olan çalışma önerisi, çalışma yürütücüleri ve bilgilendirme formu için geçerlidir.

Bu onay, yapmayı önerdiğiniz çalışmanın genel bilim etiği açısından bir değerlendirmedir. Çalışmanızda, kurumumuzun değerlendirmesi dışında kalabilen özel etik ve yasal sınırlamalara uymakla ayrıca yükümlü olduğunuz.

Kovid-19 salgını nedeniyle konulmuş olan kısıtlamaların yürürlükte olduğu süre içinde, tüm komite toplantıları elektronik ortamda yapılmaktadır; aşağıda isimleri bulunan Bilkent Üniversitesi Etik Kurulu Üyeleri adına bu yazıyı imzalama yetkisi kurul başkanındadır.

Etik Kurul Üyeleri:

Ünvan / İsim	Bölüm / Uzmanlık	
Prof.Dr. H. Altay Güvenir	Bilgisayar Mühendisliği	Başkan
Prof.Dr. Haldun Özaktaş	Elektrik ve Elektronik Müh.	Üye
Doç.Dr. Işık Yuluğ	Moleküler Biyoloji ve Genetik	Üye
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Burcu Ayşen Ürgen	Psikoloji	Üye
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi A.Bariş Özbilen	Hukuk	Üye
Prof. Dr. Özgür Ulusoy	Bilgisayar Mühendisliği	Yedek Üye
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi A.Bariş Özçelik	Hukuk	Yedek Üye

Kurul karar/toplantı No: 2024_05_07_01

Başvuru No: 555

Appendix B. Informed Consent

Deniz Yavuz Doç. Dr. Emel Özdora	 Bilkent University
--	--

Letterboxd Kullanıcılarının Kullanıcı Psikolojisi

KATILIMCI BİLGİ VE ONAY FORMU

Değerli katılımcımız, Bilkent Üniversitesi İletişim ve Tasarım Bölümü'nde yürütülen bir araştırma projesi kapsamında Deniz Yavuz tarafından yürütülen bir araştırmaya davetlisiniz.

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Letterboxd platformunun kullanıcılarının tercihlerini ve seyir kararlarını şekillendirme ve filmlere ilişkin kendi görüşlerini etkileme yollarını inceleyerek Letterboxd kullanıcılarının film tüketim alışkanlıklarını nasıl etkilediğini araştırmaktır.

Çalışma boyunca sizden bir anket cevaplamanız beklenmektedir. Bu çalışma için anket sorularınızı yanıtlamanız yaklaşık 5-10 dakikanızı alacaktır.

Çalışma size doğrudan bir fayda sağlamayacak, ancak bizim Letterboxd platformunun film tüketim alışkanlıklarını ve seyir deneyimini nasıl şekillendirdiğini daha iyi anlamamızı sağlayacaktır. Ek olarak dijital çağda yeni bir sinemai anlayışının ortaya çıkmasında Letterboxd platformunun rolünü ortaya çıkarmamız için yardımcı olacaktır.

Sonuçlar da dahil olmak üzere çalışmanın tüm yönleri gizli olacak ve sadece araştırmacılar katılımcılar hakkındaki bilgilere erişebileceklerdir. Çalışmanın sonuçları tamamen anonim bir şekilde Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar Yüksek Lisans Programı (Bilkent Üniversitesi) tez projesi kapsamında kullanılacaktır. Tanımlanmayan veriler daha sonra yeni analiz teknikleri veya hipotezleri test etmek için tekrar kullanılabilir. Hiçbir bireysel sonuç bildirilmeyecektir. Bireysel yanıtlar, her katılımcıya benzersiz kimlik numaraları atayarak ve yanıtlarını yalnızca bu numarayla ilişkilendirerek gizli tutulacaktır. Hiçbir kişisel olarak tanımlanabilir bilgi, katılımcı yanıtlarının herhangi biriyle ilişkilendirilmeyecektir.

Araştırmaya katılım tamamen gönüllülük esasına dayalıdır. Katılmak zorunda değilsiniz ve katılmanız halinde herhangi bir sebep sunmadan ve özellikle Bilkent Üniversitesi ile olan ilişkinize karşı herhangi bir sonuçla karşılaşmadan herhangi bir zamanda araştırmadan geri çekilebilirsiniz.

Bu bilgileri okuduktan sonra araştırmacıya dilediğiniz soruları yöneltebilirsiniz. Bu araştırma ile ilgili herhangi bir şikayetiniz veya çekinceniz varsa, araştırmacı Deniz Yavuz ile [redacted] tr mail adresinden veya araştırma sorumlusu Doç. Dr. Emel Özdora ile [redacted] tr adresinden e-posta ile iletişime geçebilirsiniz. Dile getirdiğiniz tüm sorunlar gizlilik içinde ele alınacak, eksiksiz bir şekilde araştırılacak ve sonuçtan size bilgi verilecektir.

Lütfen herhangi bir nedenle, verilerinizin çalışmaya dahil edilmemesini isterseniz, araştırmacılara hemen bildiriniz.

Bu bilgi ve onay formunun bir kopyası, saklamanız için size verilecektir. Bu araştırmanın etik olarak yürütülmesine ilişkin herhangi bir endişeniz varsa [REDACTED] adresinden Bilkent Üniversitesi Etik Kurulu ile iletişime geçebilirsiniz.

Bu çalışmaya katılan Bilkent öğrencileri GE 250/251 için 5 puan almaya hak kazanacaktır.

Letterboxd Kullanıcılarının Kullanıcı Psikolojisi isimli çalışmaya katılmamın istenmesi üzerine bu formu imzalayarak rıza gösteriyorum. Şunları kabul ediyorum:

1. Araştırma projesi yukarıda açıklandığı gibi gerçekleştirilecektir. Tarafıma sağlanan bilgileri okudum ve anladım. Projeye bilgi ve katılım sürecimi araştırmacı ile tartışma fırsatım oldu.
2. Katılımım gizlidir ve çalışma sırasında kazanılan bilgiler yayınlanabilir, ancak kimliğimi ortaya çıkaran hiçbir kişisel bilgi kullanılmayacaktır.
3. Katılımım rızam doğrultusunda gerçekleşecektir. Bilkent Üniversitesi ile olan ilişkimi etkilemeden herhangi bir zamanda çalışmadan çekilebilirim. Rızamın geri çekilmesi için bir sebep sunmak zorunda değilim.
4. 18 yaşıım üzerindeyim ve şu anda Doç. Dr. Emel Özdora'dan herhangi bir ders almıyorum.

İmza:

İsim:

Tarih:

Appendix C. Survey Questions

GÖRÜŞME SORULARI

Katılımcının Temel Bilgileri:

1. Kaç yaşındasınız?
2. Kendinizi hangi cinsiyet kimliğine daha yakın hissediyorsunuz?
(Kadın/Erkek/Trans/Non-binary/Cevaplamamayı tercih ederim.)
3. Tamamladığınız en yüksek eğitim düzeyi nedir?
4. Şu anda hangi üniversitede okuyorsunuz?
5. Bilkent Üniversitesi öğrencisiyseniz, Bilkent ID numaranızı yazınız. (GE250 puanı için)
6. Letterboxd platformunu ne kadar süredir kullanıyorsunuz?
7. Letterboxd platformunu en çok ne için kullanıyorsunuz?

LIKERT ÖLÇEĞİ SORULARI

Likert Ölçeği: Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum – Katılmıyorum – Ne Katılıyorum Ne Katılmıyorum – Katılıyorum – Kesinlikle Katılıyorum

1. Letterboxd kullanmaya başladığımdan beri filmleri izleyiş biçimimin değiştiğini hissediyorum.
2. Bir filmi puanlarken diğer kullanıcıların puanlamalarının üstümde etkili olduğunu hissediyorum.
3. Bir filmi puanlarken tamamen dürüst olmadığımı hissediyorum.
4. Bir film seyrederken bir yandan filme kaç puan vereceğimi düşünüyorum.
5. Bir film seyrederken bir yandan filme dair yazacağım yorumu düşünüyorum.
6. Bir filme verdiğim puan veya yazdığım yorum dolayısıyla diğer kullanıcılar tarafından yargılanacağımı hissediyorum.
7. Bir filme verdiğim puanı veya yazdığım yorumu görünce diğer kullanıcıların benim hakkında ne düşüneceklerine dair düşünüyorum.
8. Letterboxd platformunu kullanırken kendimi sinofil komüniteye ait olma ihtiyacı hissederken buluyorum.
9. Diğer Letterboxd kullanıcılarını, profillerindeki favori filmler sekmesine göre yargılıyorum veya eleştiriyorum.
10. Diğer Letterboxd kullanıcılarını, bir filme dair düşüncelerine göre yargılıyorum veya eleştiriyorum.
11. Eğer Letterboxd kullanıyor olmasaydım, bu kadar çok film izliyor olmazdım.
12. Kendimi, sadece Letterboxd günlüğüme kaydedebilmek için film izlerken buluyorum.
13. Kendimi, kaç film izlediğimiz üzerinden diğer kullanıcılarla kıyaslarken veya yarışırken buluyorum.
14. Bir film seyrettikten sonra platformdaki diğer kullanıcıların o filme dair yazdıklarını okuyorum.
15. Letterboxd platformunun kullanıcıların filmlere dair yorumları ve eleştirileri bağlamında geniş bir perspektif sunduğunu düşünüyorum.