

Film festivals' adaptation to the online space
Conceptualizing the strategy to engage online audiences

Student Name: Mireia Masó i Esteba
Student Number: 564366

Supervisor: Dr. Pawan V. Bhansing

MA Media & Creative Industries
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis
June 2021

FILM FESTIVALS' ADAPTATION TO THE ONLINE SPACE

ABSTRACT

For almost a century, film festivals have continuously developed physically while creating spaces for interacting and sharing the experience. Despite innovating on movies, activities and places, film festivals have been conservative in their format until the internet started disrupting all the established business models. Since then, a few festivals stepped into the digital world to expand the offline experience, although they are still new to digitalising the experiences. Nonetheless, with the strike of the Covid-19 pandemics, social interactions were restricted, cancelling any chance of doing film festivals in person. Due to the restrictions, film festivals had to adapt to the online space to ensure its continuance. Changing the traditional form of film festivals supposes a big challenge for its organisers and new opportunities. Using the online world to develop film festivals erases some traditional attendance barriers. For example, in the online space, film festivals can reach audiences from a national level, which erases the hindrance of location. The easiness to join a film festival online might create the belief that film festivals can reach and engage new audiences by developing an online edition. If it is true that the online space is more engaging, film festivals would be able to reach new audiences. Because, even if film festivals have a strong audience basis, these events need to expand their niche audiences to assure the festivals' continuation. With the Research Question "How to engage new audiences into film festivals through the rise of digital experiences?" this thesis seeks to establish an academic background to understand audiences and use the online space to face the mentioned audience problem. For the purpose of the study, 12 expert interviews were conducted with professionals from the film industry with experience in online film festivals. In conclusion, it is more difficult for people to feel the essence of the festival on the online space as it hinders the feeling of sharing the experience with other people. The consumption feels more individual and unidirectional on the internet, complicating that audiences live the online film festival as a pleasurable and engaging experience. As a solution, film festivals should research the targeted audiences to know what they like to improve the online experience and engage new audiences. Moreover, even if the online space can be distancing, creating unique spaces for interactions inside the online festival might enhance the experience. After analysing the interviews with thematic analysis, the research concludes that film festivals are still on a primary stage in the online world, resulting in experiences that do not help engage new audiences but improve the experience of the existing audiences. Further research needs to be done on the audience's experience to complement the study. This research also faced some limitations due to the novelty of the situation, as film festivals will not see if the attendance to the festival increases until the next edition.

KEYWORDS: *Film festivals, Experience, Audience, Digitalization, Engagement*

Table of Contents

Abstract and key words

Acknowledgements

1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	9
2.1. The sense of space.....	9
2.2. Digital experience	11
2.3. Digital audiences’ characteristics.....	13
2.4. Approaching new audiences.....	15
2.5. Digital and hybrid film festivals.....	17
3. METHODOLOGY	19
3.1. Choice of methodology	19
3.2. Sample design	20
3.3. Data collection and procedure.....	21
3.4. Operationalisation	22
3.5. Data analysis	23
3.6. Validity and reliability	23
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	25
4.1. Film festivals’ added value	25
4.2. The internet disruption	29
4.3. It is all about expectations	31
4.4. Reaching new audiences	33
5. CONCLUSION.....	38
5.1. Main findings	38
5.2. Theoretical and social implications.....	41
5.3. Limitations and further research.....	42
REFERENCES.....	43
APPENDIX A	46
APPENDIX B	48
APPENDIX C	51

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr Pawan V. Bhansing, for his unconditional support and patience during the last months. His feedback has helped me to show off the best of me during the project. This thesis has also been possible thanks to the unconditional support of my family and friends.

Last but not least, I would like to express my most significant appreciation to all the interviewees who devoted time to helping me. Getting to know them and all their experiences were really inspiring for me.

1. INTRODUCTION

Film festivals established their roots in Europe back in the 1930s, with the festivals of Venice and Cannes. These events are considered field-configuring events that assemble "various actors in a limited time-space they provide strong settings for social interaction, collective sensemaking, and play an important role in the construction reputation and status" (Rüling, 2008 p. 2). Nonetheless, the model has kept changing since then, just as the festival functions, the film culture and cultural policies (Loist, 2016). For almost a century, "festivals' ability to constantly adapt and renew has helped the film festival model to survive, self-sustain, and thrive to this day" (De Valck, 2007 in Loist, 2016 p. 53). This way, de Valck (2007) divides the development of the networks into three phases. He determines the first phase from 1932 to 1968, with the establishment of the event. The second phase goes from the 1970s to the 1980s, with the appearance of independently organised festivals. Lastly, the third phase is in the 1990s with the professionalisation and institutionalisation of the festivals.

Film festivals offer an added value to the action of watching a movie in the cinema. They have the role of producers of meaning, and cultural spaces (Vallejo, 2020) through all the activities gathered in the same physical space (Rüling & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010). Therefore, the event aims to enhance the interaction and presence of the audiences. With the strike of the pandemics, this added value had to be adapted to the online environment changing its whole essence. This new situation is a common practice to showcase the selected films through a streaming platform. YouTube has a significant role in festival development because most of the festivals display the activities there. However, some festivals like Sundance or the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) opted for creating their platform. Overall, it is essential to create spaces where the event can develop and become an arena for interacting, sharing, and connecting (Amanatidis et al., 2020).

The digital implications have been growing exponentially for the last years, changing all the established paradigms. As a result, the industry forces, such as cinema, film festivals or distributors, have to find out the best way to adapt to the changes. The novelty of the situation produces the fear that the online environment cannibalises traditional models (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2014). The traditional and existing cultural forms are constantly being redefined to face external changes and persist (Childs & Kuska, 2014). For example, in performing arts, Bakhshi and Throsby (2014) found out that streaming the show could increase revenues and attendance from theatres. The performance reached new audiences by using cinemas to stream the content. As a result, new audiences could take a glance on the experience and engage with the content. Part of these audience then perceived the gratifications of the performing arts and attended the theatre to live the complete experience. Following the same logic, film festivals could also use the digital environment to approach new audiences and then, by enhancing the participation, increase the offline attendance to the event.

Contemporary audiences assign more value to the experiences, as they accumulate cultural capital with memories rather than material goods (Mueser & Vlachos, 2018). To cope with the experiential preference, organisations started to market their products or services through the creation of an experience around the consumption. Offering experiences helps the organisations to connect with the customers in a personal, memorable way (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). In film festivals' case, they market the experience of the event by offering an additional experience to the action of watching a movie.

The online environment provides different channels to approach audiences by interacting and creating space through streaming platforms. It eases audience participation while helping film festivals to get a significant audience reach. This new approach enhances the cinematic experience from home, making it more convenient for the users (Fröber & Tomashcke, 2019) while also erasing some attendance barriers at film festivals.

Digital changes have affected all the cultural fields. For example, due to the increasing potential devices to watch movies, there is a preference among consumers for viewing films outside the cinema (Fröber & Thomaschke, 2019). The vast number of choices results in a situation of saturation, the so-called *snack culture*. Consequently, the attention capacity is affected negatively (Newman, 2010) as audiences want to consume large amounts of small content. Some researchers date the beginning of this change to the last century and it has increased through social media. It has supposed "a shift from the traditional broadcast mechanism to a many-to-many conversational model" (Hausmann & Poellmann, 2013 p.144). As a result of this behaviour, users have to perceive the experiences as attractive so that it is worth to pay attention to the content. A way to appeal audiences is to boost the users' social capital through the event, so that audiences feel rewarded after joining (Tefertiller et al., 2020). When audiences do not perceive any gratification or reward, they feel the fear of missing out (FOMO) on another experience that others are enjoying and seems more pleasant (Tefertiller et al., 2020).

Ortega et al. (2012) state how new audiences could be reluctant to film festivals as attending these events is not a recurrent practice and they have been considered a high art institution for a long time (Stevens, 2017). As a result, general audiences feel distant from them and just attended cultural events occasionally (Bunting et al., 2008). Nonetheless, contemporary audiences come "from a plurality of social worlds" (Colbert & Courchesne, 2012 p. 276) and have experienced the socialisation process as a continuum rather than differentiating high and popular art. These societal changes might be an opportunity to approach all audiences because "digital technology challenges these traditional social distinctions by enabling wider access to "high" art" (Mueser & Vlachos, 2018 p. 184).

As it will be further discussed, having an engaged audience means the continuance of attendance and that the audience feels involved on a higher level with the festival. Moreover,

audiences need to feel satisfied with the experience to achieve the expected engagement, positively influencing future attendance (Kim & Kim, 2020). While film festivals are approaching the online space, this research entails knowing if the online environment can be a feasible opportunity to increase film festival's attendance. To approach this debate on arts marketing, the research question (RQ) of this study is as follows: *How to engage new audiences into film festivals through the rise of digital experiences?*

Even if some film festivals had already stepped into the online world in some years ago in some activities (Stevens, 2017), using the online world as a space to hold a festival is still in its primary stages. Consequently, there is not much research that focuses on fully online or hybrid editions. Thus, studies also neglect the influence of online festivals on audiences. The research entails approaching this situation by covering up an academic gap on the art marketing of film festivals through the digitalisation opportunities to reach new audiences. Having various festivals as a background is expected to provide a better comprehension of the academic debate. The previous studies emphasise arts marketing (Colbert, 2003; Colbert & Courchesne, 2012; Walmsley, 2016; Tefertiller et al., 2020) and the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), but none is having an updated analysis on film festivals. The digitalisation process has been studied in other art forms, such as theatre (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2014) or music festivals (Wijnants et al., 2017). De Valck (2007), among different researchers, highlights the historical need to have more updated literature on this field.

On a societal level, this research investigates the increase of film festivals and their impact on the industry and audience. According to the International Federation of Film Producers Associations, film festivals have become a vital influence by growing exponentially from 700-800 per year in 2003 to 3500 film festivals in 2010 (Rüling & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010). This data highlights the need for organisations to provide quality communication strategies. In between all the audio-visual content that it is currently produced, film festivals need to stand out because in a world with media-shortened attention, it is easy to be unnoticed (Newman, 2010). With a background on audience behaviour and expectations applied to the digitalisation of film festivals, these organisations would know what the audience expects and offer it. At the same time, it helps to provide the basis for an online space where audiences feel immersed enough to engage and interact. The construction of this space would empower discussion spaces on relevant topics that are out of the agenda. Consequently, it can also enhance the expansion of cultural access while attracting and engaging new audiences.

Lastly, it is expected to find patterns within the previous research from other cultural forms and adapt it to the film festivals' narrative. The section two, theoretical framework, will combine studies on marketing experience, audience engagement, and online cultural events. Then, through a series of interviews, more data is provided to go beyond the literature and have real experiences as a source of information. The third section covers the methodological

framework of the interviews, which follows a thematic analysis to find patterns within the interviewees' experiences. Section four contains the results and the comparison with the literature findings, which checks the reliability of the proposed content. In the last section, there is an overview of the results to give some recommendations on the ways that film festivals can attract and engage new audiences. The limitations and directions for future research are provided in this section too.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Film festivals were created in Europe in 1932. It started with the Venice festival, followed by the film festivals of Cannes and Berlin (Vallejo, 2020) until being extended to all sizes of events and activities around the world. Traditionally, film festivals have been the showcase of the film industry. By having been considered a form of high art for many years, film festivals' influence "determines which movies are distributed in distinct cultural arenas" (Vallejo, 2020 p. 158). In addition, these cultural events provide arenas of emergence by serving as "sites for the public construction and exhibition of often both financially and culturally important film projects at various stages" (Rüiling & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010 p. 319). Thereupon, the organisation of film festivals shaping the decisions of the industry with the purpose of shaping and educating consumers, acting as teachers (Unwin et al., 2007).

Film festivals gather multiple activities (Rüiling & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010) that can vary within different types of festival. Nonetheless, the significant distinction between them is, on the one hand, the industry-based film festivals, with the purpose to create networking and enhance professional projects, and on the other hand, film festivals with open access to the public. The purpose of being open to all publics is to function as a speaker for movies with limited chances to be screened while being promoted to more audiences.

The realisation of film festivals has traditionally developed in physical spaces providing an event "which constrains and enables movement, encounters, and crossing boundaries between multiple categories of field participants" (Rüiling & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010 p. 321). However, Covid-19 has influenced the edition 2020-2021, moving the event's space to the online world. This contextual change has posed a challenge for many film festivals, but it has also given new opportunities to engage with the audience.

2.1. THE SENSE OF SPACE

The importance of the digital space has increased due to the impossibility of gathering people together and conducting events. Nonetheless, some film festivals had already stepped into the digital technologies some years ago to complement their offline experience (Stevens, 2017). For the last decade, the digitalisation process has been changing the film industry regarding content and display modes. Meanwhile, some people fear the digital technologies as they have disrupted the established art business models (Bakhsi & Throsby, 2014). The cultural sector is currently "witnessing a notable groundswell of digital engagement projects" (Walmsley, 2016 p. 66) as media consumers have shifted from traditional media to digital platforms (Kim & Kim, 2020). As Grundström (2018) states, digitalisation has become "an almost organic part of our lives" (p.6).

To adapt the offline event to the online world, some researchers highlight the need to prioritise processes over outcomes (Walmsley, 2016) so that the event keeps fulfilling the need

for connectivity and interaction between users. In theatre, for example, shows are being broadcasted in cinemas (Messer & Vlachos, 2018; Bakhshi & Throsby, 2014). Likewise, the music festivals experience is being expanded online to engage audiences that could not attend while lifting geographical barriers (Wijnants et al., 2016). A platform also exists to stream the art of dancing (Walmsley, 2016), and even sports' streaming is trying to provide a better experience throughout the screens (Kim & Kim, 2020). In contrast, film festivals are still in a primary stage of online events.

As mentioned before, there is a general fear of the new online space: it could cannibalise the known experiences (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2014). For example, since the display of films has been relocated to many screens -TV, laptop, smartphone, and others-, the cinema frequency of attendance has decreased (Weaving et al., 2020). However, some theorists believe that cinema can be relocated without losing its essence and quality, so "cinema is still an object to be discovered" (Casetti, 2015 p. 215), just as the non-linear and fluctuating behaviours of the audience.

Some researchers have studied how digitalisation has been integrated into the art forms, as almost the entire population consumes virtually some type of cultural product (Colbert, 2003). In the case of the film industry, the digitalisation has integrated this art form through "the diffusion of content on many platforms (spreadability), an interconnection of reception points (networking), and a reactivation of experiences in many situations (relocation)" (Casetti, 2015 p. 162). As a result, films have more space to be released. This fact is verified with Fröber and Thomaschke (2019), as from 1998 to 2018, the number of films produced increased by 200%. Due to the growth of releases, the importance of film festivals' role as cultural spaces and distributors has increased (Vallejo, 2020). Film festivals are the speaker of new movies while also promoting them: festivals contain a limited and selective number of films, affecting the content's social attractiveness, which highly influences the audience's perception (Aveyard, 2016).

The digital environment also gives space to new experiences, but when the physical disappears, the whole experience changes. As Grundström (2018) points out, the place and space should not be limiting on experience creation. Nonetheless, when space is not physically shared anymore, it can result in a feeling of psychological distance (Lim et al., 2012). When audiences feel distant, the experience' perception is impersonal (Walmsley, 2016) and less interacting (Lim et al., 2012) as audiences have a "rapid, independent and individualised socialisation" (Colbert & Courchesne, 2012 p. 277). Even if the mentioned feeling could affect the overall experience, some researchers found out how the distance can be erased through the sense of immersion, reached when users feel absorbed by the content. The accomplishment of immersivity is called flow and "encompasses the acts of total concentration and enjoyment" (Kim and Kim, 2020 p. 870). According to Childs & Kuksa (2014), when the visual content

submerges the user's perception, they enter on a perceptual immersion in which they ignore the medium.

It is a challenge for film festivals to offer the feeling of flow online. To achieve it, festivals must provide the appropriate online space, but audiences must also have an environment with "a series of acts that help us connect with that we are watching" (Casetti, 2015 p. 58). However, some studies demonstrated that offering an experience within a space for interaction -inhabited spaces- and the appropriate context of action -isomorph effects-, positively influences the reduction of psychological distance between users (Lim et al., 2012). This way, when the event accomplishes the space requirements, it fosters a pleasurable activity for the users (Fröber & Tomashcke, 2019).

2.2. DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

Film festivals offer an additional experience to the action of watching a movie. Through activities, the space of consumption, sharing knowledge and others, film festivals create their added value. It is not just about the content offered but also about the creation of offline interactive spaces. Sharing the same physical space creates the phenomenon of co-experience, "which is a specialised concept describing experiences between multiple users under product or service use" (Lim et al., 2012 p. 1366). When the shared experience is generated, audiences feel a closer connection to the other participants. As it has already been mentioned, the online adaptation of the traditional offline experience might not reach the audience's expectations.

The offline experience might have more perceived benefits, such as the extension of aesthetic emotions when watching a film in the cinema. However, Fröber and Thomaschke (2019) found out that their researched participants watched more movies at home. The trend of consuming cinema-like experiences from home increases the perception of having a pleasurable experience. In the case of home-cinema, these are the lower price, the commodity of being in control of the schedule, and the fact that it is effortless -as there is the possibility to stay at home in pyjamas (Fröber & Tomaschke, 2019).

One can argue that digitalisation enables film festivals to reach more audiences. Traditionally, audiences have faced some attendance barriers with offline editions. These barriers end up dispelling the audiences from attending cultural events. As a result, most audiences occasionally attend cultural events (Bunting et al., 2008). Researchers have found different barriers that have traditionally influenced audience attendance. To highlight some, Bunting et al. (2008) give us an example that living in a big city like London might increase the arts' interest of the citizens. The region of living is decisive because somewhere where the cultural options are limited, the chances of finding a pleasurable event are reduced. The digital

experience erases the location or transportation limitations since audiences can stream the content and enjoy the same activities from home.

Moreover, previous research dictates how social integration can be a barrier too. For example, people seek to fulfil social gratifications when attending cultural events because "arts attendance seems to be driven by some concept of identity" (Bunting et al., p. 64). However, the digital experience overcomes this barrier as social media provides more chances for social interaction while playing an essential role in the audience's behaviour (Tefertiller et al., 2020).

Education level or age can also influence attendance, even if it is still unclear how (Bunting et al., 2008). Surprisingly, research suggests that price is not a barrier. Colbert (2003) concluded that "in the consumers' mind, price is as much rational element as a psychological variable", meaning that when the gratifications from the user are perceived, the price is not necessarily a barrier. However, it must be noted that it does not apply to all consumers as some do not like cinema even if none of these barriers is faced (Bunting et al., 2008).

Apart from the external barriers, it is also necessary to understand what drives users' motivations. Researchers have used the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory for a long time, which helps to understand what users expect as a reward -gratification- from a product, service, or experience. This theory has been recently adapted due to the disruption of the digital space. Traditional gratifications, such as the act of "fuelling direct social interaction and conversations related to the movie attendance" (Tefertiller et al., 2020 p. 379), are evolving. According to Kim and Kim (2020) research, the gratifications have evolved to cognitive gratification, personal integration, social integration, tension release, and effective gratification (Kim & Kim, 2020). From another point of view, Steiner and Xu (2018) found out the following gratifications when watching videos in streaming: catching up, relaxation, sense of completion, cultural inclusion, and improved viewing experience. The importance of the mentioned gratifications is highlighted because the construction of the audiences' experience happens by evaluating the gratifications they seek and those they obtain (Steiner and Xu, 2018). What is more, when the users' expected gratifications are reached, they enter a pleasurable, immersive state (Kim & Kim, 2020). Finally, the continuance of consumption is assured with the accomplishment of this state.

Moreover, it is through the festival's image that audiences perceive if the attendance will result in increasing gratifications or not. Therefore, a drawback of cultural events is that people think they need a pre-established cultural capital when attending these events. This perception grows as film festivals do not screen mainstream content but more independent or social genres, and art house films signal a more exquisite content requiring higher educational or cultural background. As a result, Bunting et al. (2008) pointed out that "the higher the education level, the more likely an individual is to be an active arts attender" (p. 42). If general audiences feel they do not have the necessary background, they do not feel appealed to join. Ortega et al.

(2012) highlight that when the consumer's skills do not meet the cultural challenges, they experience a state of anxiety that can lead to boredom. Consequently, the distance and unfamiliarity with the content result in a lack of emotional engagement (Walmsley, 2016).

In essence, film festivals must enhance communication with new audiences. Digital spaces foster the possibility of using social platforms to become "a locus of social media exchanges" (Stevens, 2017 p. 670), providing more channels to approach new audiences. Through the interactions, film festivals can show to the audiences the resultant gratifications from joining the event. By enhancing debates, talks, and other activities film festivals help all the possible audiences to get the necessary background (Ortega et al., 2012).

Digital experiences enhance cultural accessibility, which might trigger new audiences to join. Nonetheless, audiences need to perceive the gratifications from attending. Therefore, audiences should feel like reaching the expected gratifications and then, the continuance of attendance is more likely to happen (Kim & Kim, 2020). As discussed, Bakshi and Throsby's (2014) found similar results on their mentioned research that followed the same direction in the performing arts form.

2.3. DIGITAL AUDIENCES' CHARACTERISTICS

Film festivals have been considered a refuge for cinephiles for a long time (Stevens, 2017). The reciprocal relationship between both forces was reached by offering a space with "cultivated 'good' cinematic taste" (Stevens, 2017 p. 664), relating film festivals to a high art form. Consequently, film festival attendance has been perceived for long as a niche activity or as a rare event for the general audiences (Bunting et al., 2008). Ortega et al. (2012) state that there is an overall reluctance for many citizens when participating or engaging in cultural activities, which hinders the appealing of the event.

Following this line of thinking, Stevens (2017) suggests that cinema-going is most related to the cinephiles: an audience who seeks more connected viewing experiences and the cultural distinction given by the place of consumption (Weaving et al., 2020). On the other hand, non-cinephiles do not care that much about the impact of technological settings (Stevens, 2017). Moreover, the lack of familiarity with art forms produces dispelling feeling to the audiences, distancing them from any possible engagement (Walmsley, 2016). Therefore, the characteristics of the attendance pattern of film festivals are characterised by the recurrence of cinephiles and the punctual participation from new audiences.

The rise of digitalisation has also changed contemporary consumers, who have become plural actors (Colbert & Courchesne, 2012). This concept highlights the different backgrounds from which the audiences come. The easy access to the internet enriches cultural pluralism (Colbert & Courchesne, 2012), hindering the established high art and popular art boundaries. As a result, the audiences consume a genres' mix where one art form does not exclude the

consumption of the other, contrarily to Bourdieu's perspective of cultural transmission where the distinction of culture -high art- and low culture -popular arts- was legitimate (Colbert & Courchesne, 2012).

Contemporary audiences value memories and experiences rather than material goods when building their social capital (Mueser & Vlachos, 2018). The concept of social capital was forged by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) to define the "sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 14). Therefore, consuming cultural events, like film festivals, is a tool for creating a personal social identity because "arts-going pleasure is deeply tied up with the opportunity to interpret the meaning and value of an art object/event" (Conner, 2013 in Weaving et al., 2020 p. 89). Audiences then share their taste portfolio (Weaving et al., 2020) which, similarly to the social capital, is a fictional catalogue of lived experiences related to culture. Hence, audiences engage with the activities that will lead them to live more experiences and lead to enrichment. Then a sense of co-experience (Lim et al., 2012) is being created where the audience feels the sought social recognition and belonging within a community (Casetti, 2015).

The discourse of events has adapted a digital narrative due to the potential of social media. Consumers use these channels to socially interact with others about their experiences (Tefertiller et al., 2020). What is more, Tefertiller et al. (2020) state that "social capital can affect the actions of people within a social network" (p. 383). When people feel that their experience is not good enough, they fear of missing out (FOMO) a pleasurable experience that others are joining (Tefertiller et al., 2020). According to this behaviour, film festivals' presence on social media is significant because it showcases what the festival offers, so that consumers know the attending rewards. Therefore, the film festivals media strategy is very important on showing the gratifications for attending, so that the audience do not feel FOMO for not being somewhere else.

When the physical interactions are limited, it is expected that social media becomes the locus of conversations (Stevens, 2017). Through social media interactions and spreadability, the importance of media content gains relevance (Tefertiller et al., 2020). Just by talking about a particular experience, the word-of-mouth promotion, the audience's expectation, and interest increase. Leveraging this marketing buzz could be a way for festivals to participate in the trends and the audiences' social capital (Tefertiller et al., 2020). These online platforms provide a closer relationship between the festival and the audiences as it is a space "to discuss, record and engage with the event and share their experiences" (Stevens, 2017 p. 670). By looking at other cultural sectors, the power of social media when organisations communicate to their public has been highlighted, especially when targeting the youth (Amanatidis et al., 2020). According to

Walmsley's research (2016), having an attractive social media strategy can result to "appeal more to new audiences and infrequent attenders" (p. 75).

Considering all the changes in the audience's behaviour, Casetti (2015) identifies new forms of bricoleur spectators. This type of audience has the willingness to gather different components to enjoy a complete and personal experience. Walmsley (2016) also mentions the idea of operational experience under the concept of networked publics. As a result, audience interaction is shifting towards bidirectional relationships, where they want to actively co-create the experience or even reinvent it (Casetti, 2015). Kidd (2011) also highlights the shift from spectators to performers as audiences interact through conversations rather than lectures. This behaviour is empowered on the digital space since the online experience requires active users with control over the consumption, such as the schedule, volume, or the play/pause button.

Whereas consumers have more options to choose from, they also reach a state of supersaturation (Newell et al., 2008). This term was created in 2001 to describe a continuous and overwhelming media exposure (Newell et al., 2008). As a result, it exists "an entire generation of media audiences as inattentive multi-taskers" (Newman, 2010 p. 592) that consume bite-size entertainment. Thus, it is the so-called snack culture, a world where audiences receive so many stimuli that cannot sustain a long duration of attention. Therefore, advertising and content of the organisations on social media might not receive the required attention. Furthermore, Tefertiller et al.'s (2020) research add that users need a constant direct connection to social media outcomes. Sometimes, it is not possible, for example, when watching a movie in the cinema.

2.4. APPROACHING NEW AUDIENCES:

Marketing cultural goods represent a challenge for organisations because it usually targets those already attracted by culture (Colbert, 2003). Moreover, current film festival audiences mainly consist of a niche already engaged and attends regularly, turning into a loyal audience. Besides them, film festivals have audiences that attend on an occasional basis as well as other potential audiences who do not attend, and they might not even consider it. Colbert (2003) states that consuming cultural products in the online world is a common practice, making a big part of the population a potential audience to be targeted. Therefore, the goal of film festivals is to catch new audiences' attention to join the event and encourage engagement leading to repetition.

To expand the audiences, organisations cannot just display themselves in front of the target. Hence, film festivals' communication must become "deeply rooted in the community" (Colbert, 2003 p. 34). Organisations need to gain insights into the non-cinephile's interests to produce content that appeals to them. Colbert and Courchesne (2012) propose the strategy of "reflecting cultural pluralism, using popular culture to make high culture sites more accessible" (p. 278) by

taking a "relational, digital, and personalised approach" (p. 279). As a result, film festivals' social media should deliver the right message to the wanted audience.

In essence, watching a film is an experience that goes further than the content consumed (Weaving et al., 2020). Film festivals enhance this experience by offering spaces for social interactions and suitable technical spaces. If so, the product that film festivals offer is a total experience around the action of watching a movie because "attending arts events fulfils hedonic rather than utilitarian needs" (Colbert, 2003 p.35).

Film festivals are marketing experiences due to their increasing value on the audience perception (Mueser & Vlachos, 2018). In addition, the idea to market the added value of the product -in this case, the act of watching a movie- is enhanced to differentiate it from the competitors (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Finally, the trend of offering experiences goes back to the already mentioned idea of supersaturation, as users want to feel rewarded for their effort (Tefertiller et al., 2020).

Kidd (2011) highlights the importance of framing the activity in which the social experience will occur. This way, following the previous idea, the audience should know the rewards in advance. It is a way to reduce or eliminate customer sacrifice (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), which is "the gap between what individual customers settle for (in buying mass produced goods and services) and what each wants exactly" (p. XIV). By displaying a clear and proper context of what the festival offers, the experience will be perceived as successful. Kidd (2011) explains this sequence suggesting that the organising frames will align with the interpretative frames from the users so that the audience will participate if they feel appealed. Colbert (2003) also stresses the importance of delivering the right expectations to the audiences as "consumers base their decisions on the signals they receive in the market and how they perceive reality" (p. 36).

To summarise a bit, film festivals first need to know what the audiences want and foster demand because attending a film festival is not a predominant activity for new audiences. Thus, the organisations need to focus on the audience's insights and boost demand. Providing the right background to the audiences through social media could result in higher interest and engagement (Colbert, 2003). Film festivals can give information about the screened content, the topic of the festival, or the role of the festival within the society to establish a solid background. Audiences will also perceive the different added value from each film festival to find the right fit. Overall, Colbert (2003) argues that arts marketing should avoid a conservative approach, but to deep into the expand audiences and use the popular culture "to make high culture site more accessible" (Colbert & Courchesne, 2012 p. 276).

Due to the novelty of the situation, there are still no best practices in the online environment. Nevertheless, some festivals have adapted thoroughly online, others went for a hybrid strategy, and lastly, a few were cancelled. Therefore, to showcase the current situation,

the researcher has chosen three recognised festivals that highlight online adaptation. More information will be provided in the following paragraphs.

2.5. DIGITAL AND HYBRID FILM FESTIVALS:

When the pandemic spread in March 2020, film festivals had to find a way out against the clock to surpass the situation. Film festivals have traditionally focused on the offline experience, so adapting to a hybrid or online edition was a brand-new situation for them. Some of the biggest festivals that already celebrated their 2021 edition serve as a clear example. This part of the research focuses on developing how some of the most influential festivals have adapted. The chosen festivals are the Sundance, the Berlinale and the International Film Festival of Rotterdam (IFFR). The Berlin and Rotterdam film festivals have been chosen to represent historic festivals (de Valck, 2006) as they usually have open access to all the public. Similarly, the Sundance festival is the biggest festival on independent cinema in the United States, and it is accessible to all publics.

These festivals have different ways to present themselves but a similar genre for the screened movies. According to Røling and Pedersen (2010), film festivals are a nexus of multiple events, and each of the examples carries them out differently. Some highlighted activities usually are masterclasses, competitions, or showcases (Røling & Pedersen, 2010). Due to their societal importance, they all adopt the teacher's role when shaping consumers' choice (Unwin et al., 2007).

The festival Sundance, from Utah, took place between January 28 and February 3 and created a new all-online form. In the past editions, it had always been a live experience all over the city. It resulted in a complete experience at different places such as cinemas or cafes that hosted events. The 2021 edition happened entirely in the online space, where the organisation created a 360° experience. On the Sundance's web, the premieres occurred in a specific three-hour window that includes the live screening, an interactive chat and a post-screening Q&A with the filmmakers and cast members. Most of the activities were free and now are displayed on the festival's website. Added to this, they created an immersive interactive experience where users could move around the space to interact with other participants as if it was a video game.

The two European festivals, The Berlin Film Festival and the IFFR started the digitalisation process some years ago. The IFFR was a pioneer in ticketing online, and both have been offering streaming content for some time. Nevertheless, the 2021 edition of these European festivals has been divided into two parts following a hybrid strategy. The first part has been online, taking place between February and March, and the second in June hosting offline screenings. As the current restrictions still influence the offline part, this study will focus on online editions.

The IFFR created an online space through a unique platform to see the movies during the festival. Even when the February edition was finished, the platform can still be used to see movies from past festival editions. Furthermore, the festival expanded the experience further with street marketing around Rotterdam, which brought engagement and spreadability of the content. Simultaneously, they also have released the Film Finder, which takes the participants through the programme and personalises the film suggestions according to the user's preferences.

The last edition for the International Filmfestspiele Berlin (the Berlinale) used the online space to be industry-based. Only journalist and market participants from 131 countries were able to watch the movies. Nonetheless, they displayed additional content online through the program Berlinale live with different live screens related to the industry or movies via YouTube. The festival has been open to all the audiences in an outdoor-only event in June.

Overall, the organisation of the three festivals have posted positive reactions to the success of the events. They have reasons to do so as the numbers of participation have not just increased but expanded around the globe. For example, the Sundance festival reached success with an audience 2.7 times larger than other editions¹. The Sundance festival helped this stage by offering discounts to at least 20% of anticipated festivalgoers to increase access for historically marginalised communities and younger audiences¹. This success was repeated with the IFFR with a 16% increase in audience representation across the Netherlands². Similarly, the Berlinale faced record numbers with 125 participants from 22 institutions in 27 countries³, as this part of the edition, was restricted to professionals and accredited personal. Hence, the presented editions have demonstrated how, when some of the studied barriers are erased, the audience reach, and attendance are higher than the previous festivals' editions.

¹ Data extracted from the Sundance website: <https://www.sundance.org/blogs/news/2021-sundance-film-festival-announces-audience-attendance>

² Data extracted from the IFFR website: <https://iffr.com/en/wide-reach-and-accessibility-february-festival-days>

³ Data extracted from the Berlinale website: https://www.berlinale.de/en/news-topics/news/detail_71625.html

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter of the paper addresses the methodology applied to conduct the research. The RQ that guides the study is: “How to engage new audiences into film festivals through the rise of digital experiences?”. Every step and decision taken to answer the RQ are justified and explained in the following sections.

3.1. CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY

The research is approached through qualitative methods to get a more in-depth knowledge of the industry and how the best inner practices work. Therefore, the research takes a cross-sectional design through semi-structured interviewing, as is explained in section 3.3. The researcher has collected the data through a qualitative analysis based on in-depth interviews. Consequently, the analysis is expected to result in non-quantifiable values and a deeper understanding of the topic. The choice of using in-depth interviews was made to get “the same deep level of knowledge and understanding as the members or participants” (Johnson, 2011 p. 5). In essence, the goal of using in-depth interviews is to get to know, through the interviewees’ experience, how the film festivals' situation during this digitalisation process is and the audiences’ response.

Additionally, the analysis of the collected data has been done through a thematic analysis. Through the thematic analysis, the researcher expects to find patterns and differences throughout the professionals while having the previously used literature as a background. After the data framing, the goal is to establish a pattern on the audience behaviour to find the best ways to engage with audiences through the digital environment.

- Thematic analysis

After conducting and transcribing 12 interviews, the amount of data was significant. Therefore, the thematic analysis method entails noting relevant opinions within a topic and create order (Boeije, 2010), reducing the risk of missing out on content. Following Bryman’s (2012) strategy for thematic analysis, the themes and subthemes are essentially found through the framework and then applied to the data. Therefore, the decision of using a *theoretical* thematic analysis is to “code for a quite specific research question” (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p. 84). This decision allows reassembling the data (Boeije, 2010) to identify recurring themes and experiences throughout the participants. Hence, it is easier to compare and complete the data within interviewees and the previous literature to find similar patterns, new opportunities, or controversies. Comparing the different sources will help the researcher focus on the core ideas to answer the research question, as film festivals are quite complex events that can distract the central purpose of the study with all the different activities and audiences.

3.2. SAMPLE DESIGN

In order to gather relevant data for the research, the targeted interviewees were professionally involved in film festivals. These participants were chosen through purposive sampling, which focuses on "selecting information-rich cases" (Patton, 2015 p. 401). However, there are several strategies within purposive sampling. This research follows the typical cases strategy to get an overall idea of film festivals and avoid atypical or extreme cases that could deviate the focus (Patton, 2015). Above all, the researcher seeks expert knowledge by interviewing professionals, understanding the professional role as a presumption for long experience and knowledge (Meuser & Nagel, 2009). Therefore, the sample is divided into three groups: film festival organisers, film critics and filmmakers. One extraordinary case within the sampling is an interviewee who is the co-founder of a streaming platform that organises a film festival, which fits inside the film festival organisers category due to their extensive experience in film festival's organisation. Another exceptional case is a participant that fits in more than one category, as she is a filmmaker while organising a film festival. What is more, in one interview, there were two interviewees. The researcher and the respondents thought that by interviewing the two co-founders of the festival, the resultant data would be richer as the interviewees would supplement each other's responses.

Film festivals are events that configure the industry by providing interaction arenas between multiple categories of field participants (Rüiling & Strandgaard Pedersen, 2010). Therefore, interviewing different influential players will provide different perspectives on the realisation of the film festivals. Moreover, to follow the typical cases strategy, it was a requirement that all participants had experienced an online edition of a film festival in professional status. All the interviewed cases complied with this norm: film festivals have adapted somehow to the online world, the two filmmakers have won several awards on the recent editions of film festivals, Filmin -the streaming platform- has increased its catalogue by hosting several film festivals, and the film critic has participated has been a special guest in online festivals.

Flick (2007) states, a heterogeneous sample within the field allows meaningful comparisons. So, having a quarter of the interviewees with a different relationship with festivals might enrich the overall conclusion. What is more, all of the respondents have the added value of considering themselves cinephiles. Therefore, we can assume that participants have also experienced other film festivals from the audience perspective, which enriches their testimonies. Without a priori intention, the sample also reached heterogeneity through the different generations from the participants. Therefore, their relationship with the online environment has been different, which provides diversity on the resultant data.

Another shared characteristic is that all the interviewees are from Europe. The reason to do so is that the different European festivals analysed, from the Netherlands, UK, France, and Spain, are expected to have a similar audience with similar behaviours. Expanding the territory

of action through other continents could result in more significant differences in consumption and organisation that might interfere with the project. Other characteristics such as gender have no relevance in choosing the sampling.

3.3. DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURE

There is no established data collection limit when doing in-depth interviews, but the intention to reach a "state of theoretical saturation" (Johnson, 2011 p. 13). Even if it is challenging to reach saturation because every interviewees' experience can be different, after having conducted 12 interviews, the data collection reached an informational redundancy level. At some point, the data gathered was similar between the interviewees' opinions and experiences: most of the festivals conducted similar activities during the festival or had the same feeling of distance with the audience. Further contextual information about the respondents is displayed in Appendix A.

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed, plus the researcher took notes while interviewing to provide more background to the data. The recordings last from 40 to 60 minutes, but the interview was longer off the record due to a more personal talk on several occasions. The researcher used the mail or social networks to contact the participants in all the cases. The content of the message was always similar, explaining the project and interview characteristics. In three cases, the respondents were reached through a snowball effect. The data collection took place between March 26th and April 22nd, 2021. With the current circumstances of social distancing, all of the interviews took place on a video call except one, thanks to the proximity of both parts.

The interview followed a semi-structured approach, in which the researcher followed an interview guide. The different interviews took place during the month of data collection while improving the drawbacks in every interview thanks to the previous experiences. Nonetheless, the process was flexible, and the guide only worked as a checkpoint. Even if the interview flow changed every time, the pre-established questions had an order to go from general to detail with the purpose of not jeopardising the interviewee's intimacy or trust (Johnson, 2011). Before the interviews, a little research on the professional environment of the interviewee was also done. It helped the researcher to adapt or prioritise the questions previously. The goal was to provide a comfortable environment where the interviewees could better develop the answers, so the order and wording of the questions are different in each interview. Accordingly, the interview was adapted on the content that the interviewee showed to establish a more conversational rapport to get "a mutual sense of cooperative self-disclosure and trust" (Johnson, 2011 p. 8). At the beginning of every interview, the interviewer also uses some icebreakers to warm up the conversation and know the respondent's background in the film industry.

Beforehand, all the interviewees knew that the researcher was also interested in cinema. Having a connection point helps in achieving a better reciprocity and rapport level. Achieving a non-hierarchical position reinforced the quality of the interview, as the interviewees did not feel as they were “teaching the novice interviewer” (Johnson, 2011 p. 6). Additionally, the interview was displayed without any sensitive topic in which the interviewees could display gender roles, reinforcing the data quality (Broom et al., 2009).

3.4. OPERATIONALISATION

As it has already been mentioned, the interviews were structured using a theoretical background. Therefore, the interview guide mentioned above was divided by operationalised concepts following a deductive approach from the presented theoretical framework. To consult the guide with all the categories and questions, go to Appendix B.

At the beginning of the interview, after the introduction and warm-up questions, the asked topic was about relocating the space of consumption. If the overall judgement of the cinematic experience is influenced by the space of consumption (Fröber & Tomashcke, 2019), the resultant experience also differs when watching a movie in a film festival's context. Through questions like “Why is a festival different from watching a movie of your choice at home?” the aim is to understand how film festivals work and shift the experience from offline to online, mainly on movie consumption.

Afterwards, the questions go deeper into the digital experience. Considering how other events have adapted to the online world, this concept entails knowing how film festivals enhance the flow of the experience (Kim & Kim, 2020). The novelty of the online paradigm supposes a series of changes, both in consumption (Fröber and Thomashcke, 2019) and space (Lim et al., 2012). With questions like “How do you feel that people share the experience through the internet?” the research will approach these changes.

It then focuses on audience behaviour, entailing to know the characteristics of the film festival's audience and the interactions through the activities. Film festivals have been a space for cinephilia for a long time (Stevens, 2017) and, with questions like “Are there some new audiences you want to reach?” the research aims to overview the different audience's characteristics and actions inside the festival.

Lastly, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, audiences must be attracted by the film festival before participating. This way, the last concept focused on is the strategy. Be it with the social media buzz (Terfertiller et al., 2020) or the provided context (Kidd, 2010), film festivals have some hooks to attract audiences. With questions like “What do you think that attracts more audiences to film festivals?” the practical aspect of the theory will be analysed.

3.5. DATA ANALYSIS

The transcripts of the interviews were analysed through a thematic analysis to find the recurrent practices and changes experimented with within this year on film festivals. The analysis has been done through the software Atlas.ti with a deductive -also called theoretical- approach to identify and capture the themes within the data concerning the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps to do a thematic analysis. Firstly, the interviews' transcript helped the researcher familiarise herself with the data, reinforced by a complete reading, to reach an immersive level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, using the software, it started the production of initial codes with open coding. This step is the labelling of relevant fragments (Boeije, 2010), focusing on the semantic level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Afterwards, the codes are grouped into themes with the axial coding (Boeije, 2010). The next step is to revise these themes to make sure that they "cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It must be noted that the reliability of the analysis increases while reviewing the content. Then, the researcher identified the listed themes to check the relevancy of the RQ. Boeije (2010) names this step as selective coding. Lastly, the analysis finalises the analysis report (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is profoundly discussed in section 4.

Before starting the interview, all the interviewees agreed to show their identity to enrich the comprehension of the results. Therefore, when the analysed results are displayed, the data from the interviews appear with the interviewee's name, followed by the professional profile of the correspondent respondent.

The resultant coding tree gathers eight categories divided into several more specific themes. From the selective coding, the resultant categories are *festival*, *actions*, *audience behaviour*, *sense of space*, *strategy*, *digitalisation*, *context*, and *cinema*. These emerge from the data, so not all of them are relevant for the RQ. To focus on the purpose of the study, the researcher selected four of these categories to develop the results -actions, audience behaviour, sense of space and strategy. The remaining categories work to provide context when necessary to enrich the result using some of the resultant themes.

3.6. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Above all, this research wants to provide accurate and reliable knowledge about the changing times that society is living. If possible, to help film festivals and researchers determine or establish future steps on the topic too. This research has been based on existing literature to satisfy the reliability criteria and the recordings and verbatim transcriptions of the interviews to have low-inference descriptors (Silverman, 2011). This data has been collected and analysed by the same researcher, annulling any misunderstanding of the content or transcription. What is more, following Silverman's (2011) criteria, the whole process has been followed with a

research diary and memos to assure its transparency. Lastly, the data was treated through the software Atlas.ti. Moreover, the analysis follows a comprehensive data treatment to ensure that the results account for the research question (Silverman, 2011).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the resultant data from the analysis is compared with the existent literature review to explore the possibilities of film festival digitalisation when reaching new audiences. As mentioned in the previous section, the researcher found eight themes during the analysis of the data. However, the research will focus on the four categories directly related to the research question: actions, audience behaviour, sense of space and strategy. The excluded themes will be used to give extra information when necessary but not to guide the research. The details of the coding tree can be found in Appendix C.

4.1. FILM FESTIVALS' ADDED VALUE

Going back to Røiling and Strandgaard Peedersen's (2010) definition of an event, it is noted by many interviewees the importance of film festivals in the industry. Even if some researchers (Vallejo, 2020; Unwin et al., 2007) say that festivals define the public agenda of the cinemas, most of the interviewees highlight how its goal is to be a speaker for the movies that otherwise would not be screened or popular. Usually, most of the content displayed on film festivals has not been seen before in the country or city of the festival. This way, when talking about the movie premiere, they are not referring to the spectacular *red-carpet* effect, such as Ignasi Àvila (film productions) names it, but the screening movies for the first time. Nikki Kamps (IFFR) describes the film festivals' role as "showcasing these stories [independent cinema] and also stories from parts of the world that otherwise, you would never hear of; I think that that is really what film festivals could save and keep."

Additionally, some of the respondents also highlighted that the role of film festivals is to connect the widest audience possible to the cinema. As discussed in previous chapters, the online edition enhanced the film festivals' accessibility, as all the festivals interviewed increased their audience reach. The increase of audience numbers has been possible because the online space erases one of the most significant barriers: location. Consequently, all the interviewees stated that the online edition resulted in an audience record, as they reached a national level. Being able to increase audiences is perceived as a success because the festivals could reach audiences that otherwise would possibly not be able to watch the movies. Because providing accessibility to movies is what film festivals are about, as Marc Vaíllo's (l'Alternativa) states.

When the location is not a barrier, it positively impacts the culture decentralisation and, consequently, the accessibility for the people who do not live in the city. Marta Nieto (La Mostra) and Marta Vilanova (Protesta and Tectònic) defend that decentralising culture is a way to break the regional differences of cultural accessibility (Bunting et al., 2008). Hence, the ability to showcase the film festivals' program online is perceived positively. Most of the respondents agree on the benefits of providing the online screenings to surpass the location

barriers, as an addition to the central offline experience, as the cinematic experience at home is inferior (Fröber & Thomaschke, 2019).

- **Online vs Offline experience**

All interviewees agree that the resultant interaction and engagement from the offline edition are irreplaceable to the online. Because even if the place and space should not limit the experience (Grundström, 2018), the online edition of film festivals has faced some constraints. Most of the interviewees remark that film festivals seek to create an added value to the screening by giving meaning and context to the content while creating spaces to share the experience and thus promoting a sense of community belonging. Film festivals "don't make the film, but we do provide the context of that film," as Nikki Kamps (IFFR) states. She then continues:

Be it online, be it offline... we provide how you view it, when you view it, am... and we try to provide a context in the sense that enriches the experience of watching that film. And of course, the IFFR selector is a curator because of the reason and the purpose for which we selected this film.

Because film festivals “play a vital role in the circulation of cultural and challenging cinema” (Uniwin et al., 2007 p. 232). As it will be further developed, contextualising the content helps on mitigating the audience’s expectations. Providing a context on the film festival enriches audiences’ experience as they get the necessary knowledge or informational background (Kidd, 2011).

The most appreciated value by all the interviewees is sharing the experience with other people when they are in the same space. According to Marta Vilanova (Protesta and Tectònic), film festivals are the meeting point where interactions happen between the audience and the festival. Alba Paz (Cinespaña) describes it as “the vital experience, the shared experience of going to the cinema... waiting before entering, talking to people, thinking about the movie, going to drink something afterwards... this is irreplaceable. Nothing can replace human interactions.” Through this sense of sharing the space and experience, film festivals get to create a sense of community-belonging (Casetti, 2015) as audiences know that people around have similar tastes and are experiencing the same, as Reteena founders noted. The event itself has “the concept of a ritual... going to the place, feeling that you belong in a community, meeting with others...” as Marc Vaíllo (l’Alternativa) highlights.

The added value to the experience of watching a movie is what makes film festivals a special event, which the respondents state that is mainly perceived on the offline space. Consequently, some interviewees state that moving shifts online is a bit scary if they cannot provide the same experience. In the online world, the spaces for interactions and the feeling of co-experiences changes. In this situation, Nikki Kamps (IFFR) noticed that "it really comes

back to that curatorship and the knowledge and the presentation of the program" by creating an online narrative. To maintain the festival essence, film festivals should adapt the festival's narrative to provide "the sense of community belonging" (Àngel Quintana, film critic) to differentiate from the conventional streaming platforms.

- **Creating the online space**

The construction of the context and the content varies upon the digital and offline space. When creating an online narrative can suppose a reduction of the program offered. The online space can seem unlimited, but if some festivals, such as Cinespaña, GFF or IFFR, had offered the same amount of movies as in the offline edition, the online festival would result in the feeling of saturation around the festival experience. Even if this means that fewer movies have the space to be screened, it ends up on a better and more personalised experience for each film. Nikki Kamps (IFFR) states:

So, let's say, normally in a festival of 12 days we have a selection of 500 films, and you have these different events that each showcase that film. You are thrown back on your online channels in an online environment to provide that context because it is not physical. So you have a lot less space to talk about what you want to talk about. So you have em... you just have limited, you can't post stories about 500 films am... and by really making the program that we present smaller we make sure that there is more focus on each film.

As a result, the festivals that applied this strategy could consciously offer each movie's personalised space and context. By providing the pertinent information, workshops, and context, audiences go with a knowledge background to the screenings, decreasing the chances of boredom (Ortega et al., 2012).

As all the interviewees agreed, the online version of film festivals is missing the essential value from the festival: the interactions. Most interviewees feel that the interactions are missing when the spaces to talk, meet the team, enjoy some drinks, or some extra activities are missing. Even if the audience can reproduce the technical aspects through home cinemas, the setting is not the same, and not every household has the same technological devices. Therefore, as some interviewees name it, the magic of the festival appears from the feeling of sharing the same space and content with different people. When everyone is at home, audiences usually consume movies or audio-visual content individually (Ignasi, film production). Consequently, it is not easy to perceive that the experience is being shared with the rest of the festival's audience, making it trickier to reach the sense of immersion (Marc Vafillo, l'Alternativa).

Due to the constant supersaturation of external inputs, contemporary audiences have lower levels of attention when consuming audio-visual content (Newman, 2010), which hinders, even more, the immersion through home cinema. At home, audiences face more distractions of the

environment such as housemates, home duties, the ability to pause and rewind the movie, among other possibilities that affect the concentration level. This situation affects not just the film but also the activities. The Reteena founders explain these changes:

It is not like when the meeting is in a hall or a roundtable discussion... normally, when it happens, people do not leave the room until it is finished. However, on YouTube or online in general, it changes a lot how they consume it. At the end... maybe while you are washing the dishes, you are listening to the discussion in the background.

The lack of face-to-face and individualisation that the online environment creates makes it more difficult for the organisers to track their characteristics and reactions to the different events. Here it follows the example from Sarah Emery (GFF):

Just kind of embracing that... start of something in the atmosphere and... we worked with some deliveries companies to be like... cocktail deliveries to your door, and food for the films... that sort of thing... just I'm not sure... at the end of the day I'm not sure how many people used them. However, I think it was a fun thing... to offer.

The perception that the online space produces distancing between the audiences resonates with Lim et al.'s research (2012), enhancing the sense of co-experiencing through digital spaces. Then, the resultant online experience differs from sharing the space and experiences with other interested audiences.

In the digital environment, the festival experience even feels more individualistic due to the schedule flexibility. The content is usually uploaded later online, so audiences do not feel the rush to attend because they will watch it when it is more convenient for them, as Marta Vilanova (Protesta and Tectònic) and Marta Nieto (La Mostra) remark. This way, there is no spatial nor temporal connection with the rest of the audience, which breaks, even more, the sense of co-experience.

Consequently, Sara Emery (GFF) explains how in these situations, audiences lack loyalty. People do not feel immersed and might leave in the middle of the activity or change the movie. What is more, when the activities are offered for free, she also remarks how the distancing behaviour increases because audiences feel that they do not connect with the festival. It can even result in not showing up to the event, even if they subscribed.

When there is not physical shared space, it is expected that film festivals create inhabited spaces where the interactions between users happen (Lim et al., 2012). Nonetheless, the interviewees did not pay that attention on creating new spaces and used the existing social media networks. The overall feeling on the social media interactions is that the interactions with the users were not significantly different from previous years -when the event was offline. To give some examples, two interviewees explained some of the experiences from the last edition where users used social media to show off what they were doing: from setting space to watch the festival with friends, to show the result of a practical workshop. Any interviewee

experienced debates about the content of the movies. Some interviewees also highlighted the increase of followers in social networks like Instagram or Twitter, but more to keep updated on the festival rather than interacting or expanding the experience.

4.2. THE INTERNET DISRUPTION

The film industry is facing substantial changes due to the increasing influence of the internet. The disruption of the internet started approximately in 2012, when first the displaying modes changed, and then the consumption style, as Àngel Quintana (film critic) develops. The behavioural changes started with the attraction to big series production called Complex TV, where cinephiles also got involved. Complex TV appeals to audiences as “they [people] get more engaged with the text through an active viewing that elevates text’s quality” (Steiner & Xu, 2018 p. 85). This way, the audience started to get more engaged with tv series rather than movies. Moreover, the consumers’ behaviour has kept changing, that nowadays the trend is to consume mini-series (Àngel Quintana, film critic).

People are used to consume a large amount of small content through Tik Tok, Instagram reels, mini-series, and more, which is influenced by the already mentioned trend of the snack culture (Marc Vaíllo, l’Alternativa). As a result, contemporary audiences cannot stand a two-hour movie (Àngel Quintana, film critic). Terfertiller et al. (2019) also stress that the consumers’ behaviour is changing, and in a two-hour movie, audiences do not fulfil their gratifications of social capital as it lacks “a direct connection to social media outcomes in the minds of the users” (p. 394). Therefore, the perception of going to the cinema changed to the extent of not being a mainstream action anymore (Marc Vaíllo, l’Alternativa).

Consequently, nowadays, the audiences have so many inputs that they cannot compromise to just one thing (Marta Vilanova, Protesta and Tectonic). The lack of compromise influences audio-visual consumption, but also on experience attendance. Marta Vilanova (Protesta and Tectonic) adds that people have a hard time saving a date for an event. The potential audiences wait until the last moment to decide whether they want to do or go somewhere else instead because contemporary consumers do not want to choose an experience as they fear of missing out (FOMO) a more pleasurable experience (Tefertiller et al., 2020).

The founders of Reteena add how the new paradigm offers the audiences a growing number of options to consume, decreasing the need to consume movies in the cinema. Because going to the cinema supposes an effort at various levels, such as the ticket price or the transport (Fröber and Thomaschke, 2019).

Additionally, the quantity of movies has also increased, making film festivals as teachers more critical than ever. As Jaume Ripoll (Filmin and AMFF) states, “content accessibility is easier than ever. This produces us, as the audience, a dilemma... to need to know what to watch and when to watch it.”

- **Sharing the online space**

All the film festivals share the same space online, which brings an overlap of agenda and content. For example, on the streaming platform Filmin, there are weeks where they host an incredible number of festivals (Jaume Ripoll, Filmin and AMFF). On the online edition of film festivals, facing the agenda and content overlap will probably be a recurring situation. As a best practice, some Catalan film festivals with a social focus merged to create an online festival, the Tectònic festival to solve the problem. Marta Vilanova (Protesta and Tectònic) explains how they came up with this mix of festivals:

We perceived that all the festivals would happen in October and November, and there will be a significant amount of them... we will not highlight. When it is offline because you go, and... you are there and live the specific experience. However, when all are digital? Well, we will not be able to differentiate from all the festivals focused on social cinema. The program will be very similar.

The situation of incompatibility is also highlighted because film festivals target similar audiences (Jaume Ripoll, Filmin and AMFF). Marc Vaïllo (l'Alternativa) states that "there are a lot of shared audiences. So, if there is a movie that has been to another festival, it will be difficult to have public on your screening. And this has happened to us." This overlap can also be found in the offline event, as there are periods of the year where several film festivals take place simultaneously. Nonetheless, due to the different locations, the inconvenience of the agenda is not noted on the offline space as the locations are different.

When a festival wants to have exclusivity on films or release, the content ends up being superimposed, and some conflicts of interest might appear. The online screening of a movie in different festivals helps part of the audience watch the movies they missed, but the content is not unique for the other film festivals anymore. As a result, some movies can end up being online for almost a year. As a possible solution, l'Alternativa has the policy of not screening films that have been on other festivals in Barcelona, at least in the competition section. This way, they do not repeat content that has already been screened and gives space to newer creations. It is also helpful for the festival as Marc Vaïllo (l'Alternativa) expresses how the audience decreases when the movie screen has been displayed before. Therefore, film festivals need to control the movie distribution to offer the space for new movies to be displayed and maintain the festivals' essence.

- **Hybrid strategy**

If the rise of digitalisation already supposed a disruption, the rapid changes from the last year increased the uncertainty of all the involved actors that still need to figure out how to adapt. Accordingly, festivals did not know what to do, as they had not tested the online options before making the 2020-2021 edition. Some festivals have used the first online edition as a test to

improve further editions. For example, Sarah Emery (GFF) thinks they will be more prepared for a future hybrid edition by establishing an online strategy and online platform in the 2021 edition.

With the current uncertainty, most interviewees assure that having a hybrid strategy helps reassure the festival's development by having a space in both environments. Being in both worlds can result in an expansion of the experience and be prepared if the offline edition falls apart, as Marta Vilanova (Protesta and Tectònic) states. Moreover, having the online as an addition erases most of the traditional barriers from the theoretical background (Bunting et al., 2008).

On the one hand, there is the idea that hybrid editions will suppose an overlap of audiences and result in a reduction of the in-person audience. Fröber and Tomaschke's (2019) support this fear with their findings of the increasing preference for home-cinema. On the other hand, some interviewees, such as Nikki Kamps (IFFR) and Marc Vaíllo (L' Alternativa), agree that the audiences are different for both spaces. The first interviewee relates to the past edition experience:

The assumption is that the audience is the same audience for the online part of the festival and the offline part of the festival, and that doesn't appear to be the case when we look at our February part, so, of course, there is an extensive overlap of people who would want to visit the festival physically and who are visiting the festival online. But there is a much larger, within the Netherlands, the bigger geographical spread of people visiting the online edition.

Accordingly, the loyal audiences would still go to the offline events, and the hybrid edition will allow them to watch more movies if the program does not meet their schedule. Nikki (IFFR) still adds how the organisation of a temporary-based screening can connect both parts of the audience. The online space supports what the offline is missing, which, as most of the interviewees agree, most of the film festivals will end up implementing. Considering the Reteena festival's example, by doing a photography exhibition online, they get a participation reach that offline would not be logistically possible. That is why they bet for the hybrid strategy but the more offline, the better. Nevertheless, working simultaneously on the online and offline experience supposes an increase in organisational work. In contrast, as Marta Nieto (La Mostra) reports, the subventions do not increase.

4.3. IT IS ALL ABOUT EXPECTATIONS

Film festivals need to find new audiences to ensure a promising future (Marta Vilanova, Protesta and Tectònic) because, even if festivals have an essential loyal audience base for years, the spectatorship does not rejuvenate or increases. Moreover, the audience basis of film festivals

is usually shared between the festivals, as it is a niche adult public. As Marta Nieto (La Mostra) points out, these *new* audiences already exist, but film festivals have not reached them yet.

Cultural forms have faced difficulties in rooting communities on the art forms for a long time (Colbert, 2003). Part of the society feels that the film festivals do not represent them even if the event has open access to all audiences (Reteena), which hinders the engagement. People perceive film festivals as high art cultural institutions (Vallejo, 2020) with an industry-based environment (Ignasi Àvila, film production). Consequently, general audiences do not feel appealed to it (Colbert, 2003) because they feel that having a previous cultural background is necessary when attending film festivals. Having the perception that film festivals are made for a niche audience produces distrust in people. Marc Vaíllo (l'Alternativa) explains that audiences are not familiar with the content or festival, and consequently, new audiences do not feel attracted by the festival. Thus, the general audiences do not perceive any gratifications from attending a film festival.

As mentioned above, all the interviewees stressed the need to attract young audiences and create cultural sensibility to assure the festivals' future. This concern is present in festivals such as Protesta, l'Alternativa Film Fest and IFFR. However, these publics are more challenging to appeal to as they do not fit in these events due to age. To address this problem in the Catalan industry, the festival Reteena was created by and for the youngest audiences to satisfy the audio-visual needs of the target and provide a comfortable environment. As its founders' state, the Reteena festival also works as an *influencer* of other film festivals so that young audiences feel targeted and attracted to join.

Consuming cultural events or movies beyond mainstream movies or blockbusters is not an ordinary social practice (Marc Vaíllo, l'Alternativa). At least four interviewees think the root of the problem relies more on education than social barriers. Therefore, the reluctant behaviour could change by educating the cultural sensibility from a young age. As a result, it supposes an extra effort for audiences to attend these events as they do not perceive any reward from joining the film festival. The online world reduces the distance between the film festivals and new audiences as most of the barriers are erased, which could be an easy way to motivate or engage with more audiences. The following sections will further discuss this approach.

- **The importance of the context**

If changing the educational system might be a bit too ambitious, four interviewees highlighted the importance of delivering the right message and image to define the festival towards the audience to create the right expectations. Having a clear identity helps the audience to know whether the festival will fulfil their expected gratifications. Nikki Kamps (IFFR) states how providing a context of what you will experience is not just done with the marketing strategy but also with the activities because "it is all about mitigating expectations." Creating

positive expectation from attending the festival will help film festivals to appeal to more audiences. Nonetheless, the created expectations must be real because when the expectations are not met, the experience can result in frustration that audiences do not want to repeat.

Film festivals can provide the right expectations about the festival through the programme of the festival. The programme not only defines the event's genre, but it is also the core of the festival. Providing a variate, attractive and exciting programme is essential in every event. It is the core message that interested audiences will have about the festival, as various respondents highlight. Therefore, the message behind the program has to arrive at the audiences and, most importantly, appeal to them enough so that they want to pay attention to it.

The essence of the festival is also delivered through the graphic image (Reteena). The festival's image usually is the first contact audiences have with the festival, whether through the marketing campaign, social networks or when searching for more information. According to Reteena's experience, the poster and its adaptations are the most popular posts on social networks. It is the central image of the festival and, thus, what more people will see. If the message is clear and the image is eye-catching, more people will pay attention to it and notice the festival. The Glasgow Film Festival also followed this strategy and re-designed its graphical image so that its online presence was more attractive than other years. Furthermore, the mix of the activities beyond the movies and the image creates the festival identity (Rüling & Pedersen, 2010). For example, the Amsterdam Spanish Film Festival case reinforces the *Spanish experience* by showcasing Spanish movies and different activities like wine and tapas tasting.

4.4. REACHING NEW AUDIENCES

All the festivals declare having this basis of a loyal crowd, which are the people that go every year. Some of the respondents define them as some activists from the festival. Marta Vilanova (Protesta and Tectònic) explains that this type of audiences are the people that save the dates of the festival without mattering what they offer. Unlike what Stevens (2017) states, these audiences do not necessarily have to be described as cinephiles. However, some interviewees think that a big part of the mentioned audience would fit under the cinephiles concept.

As Alba Paz (Cinespaña) states, you can create different audience patterns from each of the activities or topics from the festival, as there are audiences who just join the event on punctual activities. The occasional attendees are potential loyal audiences as they could end up engaging with the film festival. Furthermore, most of the society could be perceived as a potential target audience because almost the entire population consumes virtually some type of cultural product (Colbert, 2003). Nonetheless, to engage new audiences, it essential that they first feel attracted to attend the film festival, which is more likely to happen when they have extra gratification or motivation to attend the cinema (Ignasi Àvila, film production).

Initially, the lack of attendance barriers was perceived as a motivation for new audiences to experience the festivals, as attending online film festivals results effortless. Nonetheless, most interviewees stressed how it is more challenging to engage audiences when the feeling of co-experience is missing. The online environment produces distance between users and more impersonal communication because “you cannot give a cup of wine through the screen” (Virginia Pablos, Sin Fin Cinema). As a result, the experience is limited, and all the interviewees experienced the feeling of distance. Many interviewees stated that the lack of face-to-face interactions with other people hinders the sense of co-experience. According to Lim et al.’s (2012) research, film festivals would also need to create online inhabited spaces, an online space allocated to enhance interactions between users, so that the feeling of distance is reduced.

- **Online communication**

The importance of having an online presence has been going on for the last few years. However, on the last 2020-2021 editions, the online influence has been accentuated as it was almost the only way festivals could interact with their audiences, as Virginia Pablos (Sin Fin Cinema) states. Having a media presence has a significant influence on the cultural field (Colbert & Courchesne, 2012) because "if I talk about something, the first thing you will do it will search it on the internet" (Ignasi Àvila, film production).

The most popular social networks are Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. If most film festivals have had YouTube for years, the social network has just now increased its popularity as festivals used it to stream activities and then posted the workshops. Several film festivals have used YouTube to post online activities, so "at least some people can still see them [the videos] and know what we are doing" (Sarah Emery, GFF). Some film festivals' professionals also mention Tik Tok as a foreseeable plan, which confirms the fluctuant behaviour of the audience and the constant adaptation from the festivals. The researcher found usage patterns on social media. All the interviewees use the same platforms for a specific role: Instagram to attract new and young audiences, Twitter to interact and create conversations, and Facebook to maintain loyal audiences.

The increasing influence of the social networks has supposed for film festivals a shift to new storytelling. For example, the IFFR has focused on an Instagram strategy to appeal to the targeted audiences. As Nikki Kamps (IFFR) explains, they display more audio-visual content "not only on the cinema screen but also on the social media channels" to present what the festival is offering. On the other hand, the GFF focused more on Twitter to embrace quick content and interactions with the audience.

Film festivals can also use the online space to gain spreadability. Firstly, film festivals can enhance the social media buzz while offering engaging content or promoting each other. For example, the Reteena festival helps other festivals to reach younger audiences by promoting

them. Secondly, when the festival is screened online, the festivals increase their reach to a national level. In some cases, by being in national streaming platforms -such as Filmin in Spain or Cineville in the Netherlands- the buzz was even stronger. Therefore, most of the film festivals interviewed aim to continue using a hybrid strategy through these platforms to gain accessibility and spreadability. In the end, using national streaming platforms to screen the movies supposes a symbiotic relationship: the platforms get new content to offer, and the festivals an effective marketing campaign that targets cinephile audiences (Jaume Ripoll, Filmin and AMFF). When these collaborations occur, there is a lack of information about the audience's characteristics, which would not happen in an offline event.

- **Activities as a hook**

Audiences need some motivation or reward to attend a film festival. To stimulate attendance, some of the interviewees assure that they use the activities as a hook. Virginia Pablos (ASFF and Sin Fin Cinema) states that it is through the additional activities that the festival pampers its audience. Therefore, the additional activities film festivals can approach audiences that otherwise would not attend. Alba Paz adds it is the solution to make cinema approachable to everyone because the activities help the festivals reach these audiences by offering engaging content that can be both entertaining and learn to be accessible for everyone. Nikki Kamps (IFFR) stresses its importance:

I hope you can just view it from whatever context you came from, and I think that if that... if we deemed to be the case that you need this [educational] background, we are not doing it right. So, it needs to be accessible to all audiences.

Most respondents highlight that some activities receive extra attention from the general audiences—for example, inviting famous people, premiering famous movies, or concerts. Usually, the festival's peak is on the most festive activities, such as the opening or closing night (Sarah Emery, GFF). However, Jaume Ripoll (Filmin) states that it is also interesting to do activities to deepen some topics to provide the full context of the displayed content.

Film festivals can also reach more audiences by organising *community activities*, where they collaborate with other organisations to deep into some topic. As a result, these activities attract a broader audience that is not just interested in films. Marta Vilanova (Protesta and Tectònic) explains it:

In the Protesta Film Festival, we have always nourished from activities with different activities. Everything very cross-wide. This means, from people... going to spaces with a young audience to places where the audience is more adult, or maybe with people that would not organically come at our festival.

Overall, the goal of organising additional activities is to attract wider audiences to join. Then, maybe, "on the fourth concert, they already have a foot inside the cinema" and will stay for the following activities as Alba Paz (Cinespaña) reports.

As mentioned before, education is a pillar when constructing cultural sensitivity. Therefore, film festivals also try to approach audiences by organising educational centres to have the first contact with them. While all these activities positively impact and respond, film festivals do not know the resultant level of engagement. The overall hope is that from each activity, someone will change the perception of the film festival and, instead of attending on special occasions or not at all, he or she becomes a recurrent audience. Nonetheless, some interviewees agree that film festivals should do more research to get to know the audience.

- **Interaction with the audience**

The pandemic situation created chaos and uncertainty where film festivals arranged the online edition as a test, as some of the interviewees agree. On the first online edition, the film festivals focused more on transforming the content to ensure its execution rather than focusing on offering an immersive and pleasurable experience. For example, the Amsterdam Spanish Film Festival offered online and offline screenings without activities because of the uncertainty of the situation. Virginia Pablos (ASFF and Sin Fin Cinema) assures that they will try to go back to the offline activities for the next edition. If the situation does not allow it, they will use the gained experience to offer better online activities. Overall, the interviewees agree that the first online edition was a test to provide a better experience in the future.

Listening to the audience's feedback is essential to keep offering the best experiences, online or offline. Having a bidirectional relationship with the audiences is what, in the end, will help festivals to achieve the sought engagement. On the offline editions, Marta Nieto (La Mostra) describes how sometimes some attendants talk directly to the organisers to provide feedback. Marta (La Mostra) deepens on this, explaining how the interactions with the audience vary generations. She noticed that young adults are used to contacting organisations through the internet while older generations feel comfortable interacting face-to-face.

Moreover, Marta (La Mostra) assures that the most important is to offer the audiences all the necessary tools to express themselves and then listen to what they have to say. Every festival can experiment with different interaction channels, but a traditional approach is to use surveys. Nonetheless, as Marc Vaillo (l'Alternativa) remarks, people who answer the surveys sent by the festival are the already engaged audiences. Overall, the film festivals interviewed to assure that the last edition's response was positive, as people are grateful for the festival's effort in adapting and keep executing the festival. Nonetheless, all the interviewees state that executing the event entirely online is an emergency response that most of them do not want to use again.

The exceptionality of the pandemic situation also changed the audience's behaviour and situation by being in lockdown for several months. In a period where almost everything was restricted, the online experience was perceived as an escape (Reteena). Accordingly, some interviewees agree the online edition was positively received as it fulfilled the social needs when all the interactions were prohibited. In that situation, the audiences were captive, as Marta Nieto (La Mostra) describes it, so joining an event was the closest thing to emulate the offline activities.

5. CONCLUSION

This research aimed to explore the current situation of film festivals around Europe and define how they could use the online disruptiveness to improve their accessibility and awareness among new audiences. After some theoretical research, the main problem was detected: film festivals face difficulties when reaching new audiences. The main focus of this thesis is to explore a possible solution for this problem by using online opportunities to engage new audiences.

5.1. MAIN FINDINGS

Every film festival has increased its audience reach and, consequently, the attendance numbers during the Covid-19 edition. Despite of the results of the online edition, the digitalisation of film festivals cannot be regarded as an opportunity to engage new audiences because film festivals have not been able to transfer the offline co-experience to the online world. The increased accessibility of the online medium comes with a trade-off, people do not engage equally with offline and online environments. Consequently, an entirely online edition works as a follow-up for pleasing audiences who already attend film festivals, but it is not appealing enough to appeal new target audiences.

At first sight, the online editions could be interpreted as the solution to the necessity of finding new audiences. It remains unclear whether the online space will be a sustainable long-term solution, since the film festivals' professionals do not know how this year's audiences differ from previous ones or if they will follow the upcoming editions. A situation that increases the future uncertainty and maintains the need to widen the audience basis. Additionally, the organisers do not interpret the doubling of the audience number as an improvement due to the lack of the co-experience. The lack of co-experience in the online space leads to a dehumanisation of the audience, since it does not allow film festivals to identify people's reactions and, consequently, audiences were perceived only as numbers this year.

Film festivals are still in the primary stage of creating online experiences, so the 2020-2021 online editions failed to reproduce the offline festivals' added value. As it has been mentioned previously, the feeling of sharing the space and the resultant interactions are the film festivals' primary value. Among respondents, there is a consensus on stating that audiences expect a bidirectional rapport when attending a film festival, but on the first online edition, everything felt more unidirectional. Therefore, without this sense of co-experience, people miss the most valued gratification from its attendance, which hinders audience engagement

According to the U&G theory, people seek a reward when attending an event. Through the interviews, the researcher found out that the peak moments of the festival respond to the social and personal gratifications of the audiences through a more festive experience, like the opening or closing night. These nights include activities where audiences are entertained and relaxed,

which attracts different audiences than just the loyal ones. In the online world, it is more difficult to reproduce that, and therefore, to appeal to these non-recurrent audiences.

Nowadays, when addressing new audiences, film festivals face the problem that part of the audiences are not engaged with cultural events. The lack of engagement results from the perception that that when attending film festivals, you must be part of the film-industry or have the previous educational or cultural background to join. Therefore, new audiences do not perceive any resultant gratification nor have the habit of consuming cultural events. This thesis tackles the problem by exploring the concept of perception barriers as an addition to the cultural or educational barriers proposed in Bunting et al.'s (2008) research.

Film festivals should strengthen their communication strategy to provide potential audiences with a clear and attractive image, decreasing the perception barriers in the process. To do so, the festivals communication should focus on the program and the graphic design. Firstly, the program is the *product* that the festival is offering to the audiences. It is key to have an exciting program that transmits the festival's essence, while simultaneously having some mainstream content as a hook, to maximise the size and engagement of potential audiences. By offering some popular movies or other activities, such as concerts, general audiences will feel more targeted as they will already be familiar with part of the content. Secondly, the graphic design works as the cover letter of the festival on social media. It also reinforces the targeting because the image can define the festival's expected environment. Therefore, when the festival provides an eye-catching image people will pay attention to it more easily.

Due to the *supersaturation* of content (Newell et al., 2008), every film festival needs to stand out from the others in the audiences' minds by emphasizing the rewards of attending. If audiences do not perceive any gratification, they will *not have time* to pay attention to it. By creating a clear context for the film festival, the audiences know what the festival represents and, consequently, forecast the gratifications of attending. Again, the communication strategy is important to enhance a pleasurable prediction while delivering an attractive message. This pleasurable and expected experience can be achieved through the alignment of what the festival offers and what the users expect (Kidd, 2010). On the other hand, if the expectations are not fulfilled, it can result in a negative experience that audiences will not want to repeat (Kim & Kim, 2020).

Social media has increased its influence as a communication channel from organisations to audiences (Tefertiller et al., 2020), especially when the offline space is missing. As a result, film festivals must adapt to the new consumption behaviour to reach the targeted audiences by adopting an online narrative. The online space serves the purpose of showcasing the film festival but also to reproduce social interactions when they cannot happen in-person. Since the development of online, film festivals are still in the primary stages and organisers cannot rely solely on the online space to provide the sense of co-experience. To facilitate the introduction of

online film festivals, reinforcing the social media strategy with the goal of reducing the feeling of distance of an online audience might be necessary (Lim et al., 2012).

For the moment, following the examples of the film festivals of Berlin and Rotterdam, most festivals have adopted a hybrid strategy. This way, they assure that the values of the festival will be preserved through the offline experience and use the online medium as an expansion. As a result, a minority of festivals have adopted a 360° online experience. An example is the Sundance film festival, which successfully transitioned to the online medium and could be considered as a best practice to follow.

New and young audiences are adopting this fast-consuming behaviour that differs from the film festivals traditional settled adult audiences. The behavioural changes and digitalisation process leads to a growing concern between the film festival organisers, as this is not suitable for the traditional way that film festivals are displayed. These changes are defined by the *snack culture*, where users consume large amounts of audio-visual snippets. Following snack culture, audiences find it difficult to sustain long periods of attention, resulting in an uncertain future for film festivals.

This research has found a gap in the audiences' need of creating their own experience. Previous literature stresses the concepts of *bricoleur* (Cassetti, 2015) or *networked publics* (Walmsley, 2016) and how current audiences want to create their own experience. None of the interviewed festivals made use of these concept for the online edition. A possible explanation for this occurrence is the limiting interaction of online space with acquaintances that fulfil their social integration need (Tefertiller et al., 2020), which is restricted to a more private level. Further research into this hypothesis is necessary.

As it has been mentioned, the added value that film festivals offer on the online world is not perceived. As opposed to other art forms, watching films at home is a smooth action that audiences can do on their own. Therefore, the online edition of the film festivals is not perceived as special or beneficial. Its added value is the co-experience of the presential place, and the lack thereof might restrict their reach to niche audiences interested in the content rather than on the event itself. Furthermore, this research highlights the possibility that the new audiences that have increased film festivals' attendance on the online edition could be audiences that already attend or have interest on film festivals. Audiences that already attended festivals but are now able to participate in a larger variety of festivals due to the increased accessibility of the online medium, are not considered new audiences, since they were not engaged by their interest in the online format. In this case, online film festivals are unsuccessful in expanding further than their traditional target audience.

Even if film festivals enhance the cultural sensibility of films, people will perceive the act of going to a movie as an additional special occasion from home-cinema. Moreover, this study found no evidence supporting the belief that the new online space will substitute the traditional

experiences until its disappearance (Bakhshi & Throsby, 2014), although watching movies from home is becoming a preference (Fröber & Tomaschke, 2019). Possibly the offline attendance will continuously decrease until it remains as a special occasion of going to the selected film festivals rather than a recurrent action.

Lastly, it is crucial to remember that this research has been done on a transition period where there is high uncertainty. The current lack of information on the potential of online festivals means that the involved actors still need to figure out their relationship with the online space.

5.2. THEORETICAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are some alignments and controversies between the research findings and the theoretical discourse addressed in the theory chapter. This research was entailed to fill in the academic gap on the engagement through online film festivals. A topic that has been researched for other cultural events but not on film festivals. The cause of the academic gap on film festivals might be the novelty of the online situation, as they are predominantly rooted in a traditional offline format. By combining studies on marketing experiences, audience engagement and online cultural events this research has got a new approach on the film festival experience.

Filling the academic gap gives relevance to the research as it provides context and background to both researchers and film festivals. The above-mentioned combination of studies will improve the researchers' understanding of audiences and can be used for further research on the subject. For example, this research has updated some of the consumption barriers defined by Bunting et al. (2008). Additionally, some articles state the end of the high art and popular art differentiation (Colbert & Courchesne, 2012; Mueser & Vlachos, 2018; Ortega et al., 2012). Despite culture becoming more approachable due to the internet, this study noted how the differences between high and popular art in film festivals are still perceived. Colbert's (2003) research also follows this line of thinking, making his recommendations for institutions perceived as high art still relevant.

The organisation of film festivals has spread worldwide, becoming an influential force on the film industry. Contrary to its influence, the research on film festivals is still scarce (Rüling, 2008). This research strives to be societally relevant, helping film festivals understand and address new audiences. Even if entirely online versions of the festivals do not show much potential, film festivals are more open to adopting a hybrid format. To improve the development of the online aspect of a hybrid format, the insights derived from this research work as a basis for establishing digital engagement through the festival's communication strategy. With a fitting communication strategy, film festivals could then enhance the expansion of cultural access through the digital version of the event.

5.3. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The choice of using in-depth semi-structured expert interviews with professionals related to film festivals gave depth to the point of view of the research topic. All experts considered themselves as cinephiles, which provides additional insights into the topic from the audiences' perspective. Nonetheless, it is recognised that a mixed-method approach focused on the audience's perspective could enrich the research. Although all the interviewees were professionals, their experiences with the digitalization of the events were limited due to the novelty of the situation. Furthermore, the film festivals perceived the online environment as unidirectional, which translated to a prior belief by the professionals that the online medium does not offer immersive experiences. The lack of professionals convinced by the potentials of the online space hindered the analysis with the previous literature, as different approaches were implemented. Consequently, this research helps understand the situation of the film festival organisations at the present, but it lacks a technical perspective found in theoretical frameworks.

The initial idea of the research was to focus on the digital engagement of new audiences, but it is still early to calculate the resultant engagement. As several respondents said, the film festivals' changes happen slowly across editions. A possible solution is to track the increase of followers and interactions on social media as a possible scale to measure the engagement.

Before the data collection, the idea of conducting the interviews online seemed restrictive. Contrary to what was expected, it ended up being positive as it helped to schedule the meetings and be able to interview people from different locations with ease.

For further research, it would be interesting to complement this analysis by focusing on the audience perspective, through surveys or interviews with film festival attendees. It would result on novel information due to the early life of the online approach. Additionally, a follow-up of the evolution of audience interaction on the coming editions of the researched film festivals might be beneficial to glean further insights. By comparing the results of this research with possible follow-up interviews, changes in the audiences' characteristics and behaviour can be analysed. The comparison can answer whether the online edition helped engage new audiences or if it was just an alternative to the external circumstances. Lastly, it would also be interesting to focus on the content of the interactions through social media. Adding this variable to further research would provide a more detailed background on the audiences' conversations and thus, enhance the film festivals' use of social media to expand the festivals' experience.

REFERENCES

- Amanatidis, D., Mylona, I., Mamalis, S., & Kamenidou, I. E. (2020). Social media for cultural communication: A critical investigation of museums' Instagram practices. *Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing (JTHSM)*, 6(2), 38-44.
- Aveyard, K. (2016). Film consumption in the 21st century: engaging with non-theatrical viewing. *Media International Australia, Incorporating Culture & Policy*, 160(1), 140–149. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1329878X16642851>
- Bakhshi, H., & Throsby, D. (2014). Digital complements or substitutes? a quasi-field experiment from the royal national theatre. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 38(1), 1–8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10824-013-9201-2>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Broom, A., Hand, K., & Tovey, P. (2009). The role of gender, environment and individual biography in shaping qualitative data. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 12, 51-65. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13645570701606028>
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Bunting, C., Chan, T. W., Goldthorpe, J., Keaney, E., & Oskala, A. (2008). *From indifference to enthusiasm: patterns of arts attendance in England*. London: Arts council England.
- Casetti, F. (2015). *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Key Words for Cinema to Come*. New York: Columbia University Press. <https://dx.doi.org/10.7312/case17242>
- Colbert, F. (2003). Entrepreneurship and Leadership in Marketing the Arts. *International Journal of Arts Management*, 6(1), 30-39.
- Colbert, F., & Courchesne, A. (2012). Critical issues in the marketing of cultural goods: The decisive influence of cultural transmission. *City, Culture and Society*, 3(4), 275-280. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2012.11.006>
- De Valck, M. (2007). Introduction: Film Festivals as Sites of Passage. In *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (pp. 13-43). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9789048506729-002>
- Flick, U. (2007). Sampling, selecting and access. In U. Flick (Ed.), *Designing qualitative research* (pp. 25-35). London: SAGE Publications, Ltd. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781849208826.n3>
- Fröber, K., & Thomaschke, R. (2019). In the dark cube: movie theater context enhances the valuation and aesthetic experience of watching films. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, (2019). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/aca0000295>
- Grundström, H. (2018). What digital revolution? Cinema-going as practice. *Participations. Journal of audience and reception studies*, 15(1), 5-22.

- Johnson, J. M. (2011). *In-depth interviewing*. In Jaber F. Gubrium & James A. Holstein (Eds.). *Handbook of Interview Research* (pp. 103-119). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412973588>
- Kidd, J. (2011). Enacting engagement online: framing social media use for the museum. *Information Technology & People*, 24(1), 64–77. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09593841111109422>
- Kim, H. S., & Kim, M. (2020). Viewing sports online together? psychological consequences on social live streaming service usage. *Sport Management Review*, 23(5), 869–882. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2019.12.007>
- Kuksa, I., & Childs, M. (2014). *Making sense of space: the design and experience of virtual spaces as a tool for communication* (Ser. Chandos information professional series). Oxford: Chandos Publishing. https://learning-oreilly-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/library/view/making-sense-of/9781843347408/xhtml/9781780634067_cover.xhtml
- Lim, S., Cha, S. Y., Park, C., Lee, I., & Kim, J. (2012). Getting closer and experiencing together: Antecedents and consequences of psychological distance in social media-enhanced real-time streaming video. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(4), 1365-1378. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.02.022>
- Loist, S. (2016). The film festival circuit: Networks, hierarchies, and circulation. In de Valck, M. Kredell, B., & Loist, S. (Eds.), *Film festivals: history, theory, method, practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Mueser, D., & Vlachos, P. (2018). Almost like being there? a conceptualisation of live-streaming theatre. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, 9(2), 183–203. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1108/IJEFM-05-2018-0030>
- Newell J, Pilotta J, Thomas J. (2008). Mass media displacement and saturation. *International journal on media management*, 10(4), 131-138. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14241270802426600>
- Newman, M. Z. (2010). New media, young audiences and discourses of attention: from Sesame Street to ‘snack culture.’ *Media, Culture & Society*, 32(4), 581–596. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0163443710367693>
- Ortega, C., Eizaguirre, A., & Cuenca, M. (2012). Can Leisure Studies enlighten the development of cultural audiences?. *ENCATC Journal of Cultural Management and Policy*, 2(2), 6-11.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. Sage (4th ed.). London: Sage.
- Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (2011). *The experience economy* (Updated edition.). Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business Review Press. WorldCat.org

- Rüling, C. C. (2009). Festivals as field-configuring events: The Annecy international animated film festival and market. *Film festival yearbook*, 1, 49-66.
- Rüling, C. C., & Strandgaard Pedersen, J. (2010). Film festival research from an organizational studies perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 26(3), 318–323.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2010.06.006>
- Stevens, K. (2017). Between like and love: Cinephilia and connected viewing in film festival audiences. *Participations*, 14(2), 660-681.
- Tefertiller, A. C., Maxwell, L. C., & Morris, D. L. I. I. (2020). Social media goes to the movies: fear of missing out, social capital, and social motivations of cinema attendance. *Mass Communication and Society*, 23(3), 378–399.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2019.1653468>
- Unwin, E., Kerrigan, F., Waite, K., & Grant, D. (2007). Getting the picture: programme awareness amongst film festival customers. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 12(3), 231–245. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.303>
- Vallejo, A. (2020). Rethinking the canon: the role of film festivals in shaping film history. *Studies in European Cinema*, 17(2), 155–169.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17411548.2020.1765631>
- Walmsley, B. (2016). From arts marketing to audience enrichment: how digital engagement can deepen and democratize artistic exchange with audiences. *Poetics*, 58, 66–78.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2016.07.001>
- Weaving, S., Hight, C., Nobes, K., & Pasvolsky, C. (2020). Working with the Australian cinema industry to understand the movie-going experience. *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, 14(2), 80-94. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17503175.2020.1810459>
- Wijnants, M., Rovelo, G., Quax, P., & Lamotte, W. (2017). Wandercouch. *Multimedia Tools and Applications*, 76(4), 5721–5753. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11042-016-3888-y>

APPENDIX A

Respondents' information

	Name	Role	Organisation	
1	Alba Paz	Co-director	Cinespaña (Toulouse)	Festival that broadcasts Spanish movies in France. During the 2020 edition, they kept the offline edition with punctual online activities.
2	Àngel Quintana	Film critic	-	Film specialist that collaborates with as a film critic in different media.
3	Clàudia Mera & Maria Castellvi	Co-founders	Reteena (Barcelona)	Festival that focuses on young audiences. During the 2020 edition they went entirely online with some in-person screenings.
4	Ignasi Àvila	Co-writer and photography director	Les dues nits d'ahir (MOVIE)	Ignasi is part of the team from a movie awarded in several festivals during 2020.
5	Jaume Ripoll	Co-founder	Filmin (streaming platform) & Atlàntida Mallorca Film Fest- AMFF (Mallorca)	Filmin is the Spanish streaming platform where most of the Spanish festivals have displayed their movies. AMMF is the first online film festival that evolved to the physical space. Since then, they have adopted a hybrid strategy.
6	Marc Vaíllo	Co-director	L'Alternativa (Barcelona)	Referent festival in Barcelona that screens art-house movies, that usually are unknown. In the last edition, they went fully online due to the restriction changes.
7	Marta Nieto	Program coordinator	Mostra Internacional de Films de Dones (Barcelona)	Instead of having the traditional yearly form, the organisation provides films and activities all over the year. The festival seeks to empower the audio-visual content made by women. It usually has a hybrid edition by streaming content through Filmin,

				but on the 2020 edition, it went entirely online.
8	Marta Vilanova	Co-founder	Festival Protesta (Vic) & Festival Tectònic (Online)	Due to the impossibility of offering the Protesta in person, the organisation decided to cooperate with other film festivals with a social focus. As a result, the Tectònic Festival was created, developed entirely online.
9	Nikki Kamps	Manager Marketing & Communication	International Film Festival Rotterdam- IFFR (Rotterdam)	Being one of the most influential festivals, IFFR displays mainly independent movies. The 2020 edition was held offline before the pandemics, and 2021 has been divided to offer a hybrid strategy.
10	Núria Gimenez	Director	My Mexican Bretzel (MOVIE) & LaInesperada.cat (Barcelona)	A documentary movie that awarded in several festivals before and during the pandemics. LaInesperada.cat is a new-born festival that contemplates the offline space.
11	Sarah Emery	Coordinator	Glasgow Film Festival- GFF (Glasgow)	GFF is one of the friendliest ⁴ film festivals with a 2020 online edition. It changed the whole event, as the GFF highlights for displaying movies in unusual places. The 2021 edition was online.
12	Virginia Pablos	Director & Founder	Amsterdam Spanish Film Festival- ASFF (Amsterdam) & Sin Fin Cinema (organisation)	To approach the Spanish culture to other countries, the ASFF usually organises cultural encounters around the thematic. The 2020 edition was affected by the pandemics. This edition missed all the added activities, and they only organised offline and online screenings.

⁴ Description retrieved from the GFF website: <https://glasgowfilm.org/glasgow-film-festival/about-the-festival>

APPENDIX B

Topic guide for the interviews

SMALL TALK:

- What made you start working in the film industry (as a film festival professional, director, critic)?
- Would you consider yourself a cinephile? Do you usually attend other film festivals?

RELOCATION:

- The internet has changed our way of consuming, behaving and even performing. How do you feel that it has affected the film industry?
- Why is a festival different from watching a film of your choice at home?
- What do you offer for being more than watching a film?
- How important is space where audiences will watch the festival?
- "Film festivals are a form of high art representation." Do you think this statement is still accurate? How has it changed with the internet?
- In my research, I have found two different options for the implications of this digitalisation process. Some argue that this new form will cannibalise the traditional way of doing cinema, affecting the revenue, the content... but others believe that cinema will not lose its essence by adapting to new forms. Which is your position?

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE:

- Does the festival create an online space that enhances social interactions? How does it work?
- How do you feel that people share the experience through the internet?
- What do you think that audiences expect from attending an online festival?
- What do you think that every film festival must offer on the online space? How does it differ from the offline experience?
- According to an article, by 2010, there were approximately 3500 film festivals per year. Now, there may be even more film festivals. Do you think it is good to have this variety of film festivals, or is it leading to saturation?

AUDIENCE:

- Do you feel that your audience is a niche? Or is it quite spread in society?
- If you had to define your audience in one person, how would you describe him or her?
- How has your audience changed on the last online/hybrid edition?

- How do you engage with the festival's recurrent audience?
- Are there some new audiences you want to reach?
 - o How would you do it?
- Why have you not been able to reach these audiences yet?
- What do you want to offer to your audience?
- Do you think that audiences need specific education or cultural background to enjoy a film festival?
 - o (If the answer is yes:) How can you help general audiences to have the needed background?
- Do you think that the digital space enhances the participatory need of the audience? How does it your festival?

STRATEGY:

- What do you think attracts more audiences to a film festival? And in the digital space?
- What changes have you applied when going online?
- Which role has the website/platform where the festival is held?
- When the face to face interactions are missing, which role does social media play?
- What is your prediction for the future?
- There is research where they focused on live theatre performances and the live-streaming of these in cinemas. It has been the result of digitalisation for this sector, and they tried to see if the model was cannibalising the established forms or not. As a result, the researchers found out that the satellite transmission of the theatre performance was associated with the increase in bookings for live performances rather than cannibalising them. Do you think that film festivals can reproduce the same results through the online edition?

The interviewer used the previous questions for the interviews to film festivals' organisers. Nonetheless, the researcher also created some additional and specific questions to ask the filmmakers and the critic in addition to the previous questions to detail more on the different sample categories.

TO DIRECTORS:

- How do you think that screening your movie at a film festival engages with the audience?
- Do you think that by participating in a film festival, your audience is already defined?
- How do you think it differs from watching your movie at home or in a cinema? And within a film festival program?

TO CRITIC:

- Have you noted a significant difference in film festivals' practices or audience response across the years?
- As a cinephile, how do you engage more with a festival?
- How do you think it can work for wider audiences?
- How do you think people share their experiences at film festivals?
- Do you believe that festivals should be (more) active in acquiring new audiences?
Why?

APPENDIX C

Coding tree

SELECTIVE CODING	AXIAL CODING
FESTIVAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Background - Online problems - Festival role - Programming
ACTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offline activities - Online activities - Community activities - Must - Education
AUDIENCE BEHAVIOUR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activities response - Public behaviour - Consumer behaviour - Cinephile behaviour - Interaction - Consumption changes - Audience characteristics - Online reach
SENSE OF SPACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Event - Offline experience - Online experience - Problems - Hybrid
STRATEGY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tactics - Social networks strategy - Partnerships - Communication strategy - Reach of new audiences - Market - Art's approach
DIGITALIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negative effects - Positive effects - Differences - Future - Industry evolution
CONTEXT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Situation - Opinion - Movie distribution
CINEMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Movie-going - Cinema problems - Cinema situation