

Toward a qualitative understanding of binge-watching behaviors: A focus group approach

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Background and aims: Binge-watching (i.e., seeing multiple episodes of the same TV series in a row) now constitutes a widespread phenomenon. However, little is known about the psychological factors underlying this behavior, as reflected by the paucity of available studies, most merely focusing on its potential harmfulness by applying the classic criteria used for other addictive disorders without exploring the uniqueness of binge-watching. This study thus aimed to take the opposite approach as a first step toward a genuine understanding of binge-watching behaviors through a qualitative analysis of the phenomenological characteristics of TV series watching. *Methods:* A focus group of regular TV series viewers ($N=7$) was established to explore a wide range of aspects related to TV series watching (e.g., motives, viewing practices, and related behaviors). *Results:* A content analysis identified binge-watching features across three dimensions: TV series watching motivations, TV series watching engagement, and structural characteristics of TV shows. Most participants acknowledged that TV series watching can become addictive, but they all agreed having trouble recognizing themselves as truly being an “addict.” Although obvious connections could be established with substance addiction criteria and symptoms, such parallelism appeared to be insufficient, as several distinctive facets emerged (e.g., positive view, transient overinvolvement, context dependency, and low everyday life impact). *Discussion and conclusion:* The research should go beyond the classic biomedical and psychological models of addictive behaviors to account for binge-watching in order to explore its specificities and generate the first steps toward an adequate theoretical rationale for these emerging problematic behaviors.

Keywords: behavioral addictions, TV series, binge-watching, focus groups, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

At the crossroads between the new golden age of television (Pichard, 2011) and technological progress that provides viewers with the possibility to watch any show at any time, binge-watching (i.e., seeing multiple episodes of the same TV series in a row) now constitutes a widespread phenomenon. Watching episodes back to back is not just a transitory trend in viewers' practices, but has continued to increase in recent years, as shown by some media company surveys (Marketcast, 2013; TiVo Inc., 2015), and is even becoming the new norm for consuming TV shows (Skipper, 2014; West, 2013). In today's era, when viewers are overwhelmed by the huge amount of content on offer (e.g., Rivet, 2016), viewing TV series represents an everyday behavior for many, likely leading to excessive involvement and adverse consequences for a subgroup of individuals according to several reports that emphasized associated physical fatigue and depressive symptoms (Devasagayam, 2014; Sung, Kang, & Wee, 2015), and that suggested a link with sedentary life and health issues (Shirakawa et al., 2016).

Even though academic research has recently started to tentatively define binge-watching (watching more than two consecutive episodes of the same TV show in one go) and to identify its associated factors (harmonious passion, reflective and impulsive factors; Orosz, Vallerand, Bøthe, Tóth-Király, & Paskuj, 2016; Sung et al., 2015; Walton-Pattison, Dombrowski, & Pesseau, 2016), little is known about the psychological processes underlying this habit or its impact on viewers. Concerning the latter issue, TV series viewers and commentators frequently use drug addiction terminology to describe binge-watching (Bassist, 2013; Pinto, 2014; Ramsay, 2013), and the matter has most often been dealt with by applying the classic criteria used for other addictive states, without exploring the specificity and uniqueness of TV series watching and binge-watching. For example, Orosz, Bøthe, and Tóth-Király (2016) have recently developed an assessment questionnaire strictly related to the

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symptom-based components model of addiction (Griffiths, 2005). Although consistent with usual practices in behavioral addiction research (Billieux, Schimmenti, Khazaal, Maurage, & Heeren, 2015; James & Tunney, 2016; Kardefelt-Winther et al., 2017; Mihordin, 2012; Starcevic, 2016), this approach is not appropriate for initiating a genuine examination of such an emerging behavioral phenomenon. Thus, as an alternative to this apparent prevailing trend, this study aimed to take a first step toward a comprehensive understanding of binge-watching behavior through a qualitative analysis of the phenomenological characteristics of TV series watching beyond the mere application of substance-related addiction criteria. Capitalizing on the findings of such an exploratory approach may pave the way to a discussion about the fact that making use of confirmatory approaches in the present context is of no relevance.

Current study

In keeping with an exploratory perspective, we established a focus group at the Université catholique de Louvain (Belgium) consisting of people who frequently watch TV series in order to explore the phenomenological characteristics of TV series watching and thus capture related features of binge-watching behaviors. Indeed, the focus group methodology has proved to be particularly sound in approaching such emerging phenomena, as it allows one to objectify the inherent workings and factors associated with a given topic. More precisely, the focus group described in this report constitutes the initial step of a broader research program aimed at disentangling the psychological factors involved in the onset and maintenance of binge-watching behaviors. To avoiding the trap of the confirmatory approach inherent in much behavioral addiction research (Billieux et al., 2015), we decided to qualitatively approach the phenomenon under investigation prior to developing scales that measure binge-watching motives or symptoms.

METHODS

Participants

Seven adults participated in the focus group, which corresponds to an ideal sample size for generating content with this qualitative method (Moreau et al., 2004). Participants were recruited by an announcement posted to a pool of volunteers who regularly contribute to research conducted at the Psychological Sciences Research Institute (Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium). Inclusion criteria were as follows: being 18 years or older; being fluent in French; and having seen, in the last month, TV series episodes at regular intervals or more intensively (several episodes in a row) on USB, DVD, SVOD, or other streaming devices. No specific exclusion criterion was applied. The characteristics of the participants are reported in Table 1.

Procedure

The study consisted of two steps. In an initial step, which took place 2 weeks before the focus group began,

Table 1. Gender, age, professional occupation, viewing habits, and self-evaluation of the participants regarding TV series watching

Participants ID	Gender	Age (years)	Professional occupation	TV series watching frequency	Viewing duration for a typical working day	Viewing duration for a typical day off	Number of episodes seen during a typical screening session	Do you consider yourself as dependent on TV series?	Do you consider your TV series consumption as problematic?
Participant 1	M	25	Translator	Once or several times a day	45 min	2 hr	1	Not at all	Not at all
Participant 2	F	21	Student	Once or several times a day	2 hr	3 hr	2	A bit	A bit
Participant 3	M	24	Student	Once or several times a day	2 hr	2 hr	2	Not at all	Not at all
Participant 4	F	24	Unemployed	Once or several times a day	3–4 hr	4–5 hr	4	Absolutely	A bit
Participant 5	F	21	Student	Once or several times a day	2 hr	5 hr	6	Absolutely	A bit
Participant 6	F	36	Researcher	Once or several times a day	2 hr	3 hr	3	Moderately	A bit
Participant 7	F	67	Administrative officer	Once or several times a week	2 hr	2–4 hr	2	A bit	Not at all

Note. F = female; M = male.

participants were invited to complete, via an online survey, a series of items assessing binge-watching-related features (e.g., motives for watching TV series and manifestation of excessive watching) that were based on the available literature and the authors' knowledge. Representative items included the following: "I watch TV series to have fun and distract myself," "I watch TV series more than I should," or "My time to watch TV series impacts on my academic or professional performance." The focus group was then conducted. All participants received a summary of the study objectives and were all informed that they were entirely free to quit the study at any moment and without any justification or penalty. All participants received compensation of €25 for their contribution.

The first question of the focus group was used to collect feedback regarding the items that we initially generated. A series of fundamental questions, developed in keeping with the objectives and theoretical tenets that ground the research program in which the focus group took place, was then used to explore a wide range of features related to TV series watching, such as the various motives involved, viewing practices, and related behaviors (see Appendix). The focus group lasted about 1.5 hr and was conducted by the first author (MF) with the help of a researcher with experience in conducting focus groups. The focus group was recorded with an audio recorder and transcribed thereafter in its entirety. Content was explored by using a logical-semantic method (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Mucchielli, 2006; Simard, 1989), a categorization approach combining thematic, structural, and frequency analyses. More precisely, it consisted of, first, systematic data processing, in which we took an inventory of all the key words or concepts that were mentioned at least three times throughout the focus group in order to identify significant units. These units were then clustered into various subthemes on the basis of their thematic concomitance (thematic analysis) before being organized and categorized according to their meaning analogies and following a hierarchical classification that goes from the particular to the general (structural analysis). Finally, as a result of this process, the main themes were identified according to their frequency of occurrence (frequency analysis).

Ethics

The study procedures were designed in accordance with ethical standards concerning research projects that involve human beings at the Université catholique de Louvain. The study obtained approval from the Psychological Sciences Research Institute Ethics Committee. All participants were informed about the study and signed an informed consent form certifying their willingness to participate.

RESULTS

Content analysis

The content analysis that we conducted identified three main themes and a series of subthemes, some of which

were unique to TV series watching, whereas others were comparable to features found in other types of leisure activities, coping mechanisms, or addictive and impulsive behaviors. The three main themes identified were (a) *TV series watching motivations* (247 verbatim; see Figure 1), (b) *TV series watching engagement* (167 verbatim; see Figure 2), and (c) *structural characteristics of TV shows* (95 verbatim; see Figure 3). In the following sections, each main theme and related subthemes (emphasized in italics) are described and illustrated by participants' quotes available in Table 2. Each time a quote is used, the identification of the participant is provided on the basis of the information in Table 1.

TV series watching motivations

Immersion. Participants indicated that they *immerse* themselves in stories that provide *entertainment* and *relaxation* and that take things off their mind within a popular *pastime*, which often occurred to avoid boredom. There was a consensus (7/7) among participants that the key factor in the matter seems to be *emotional connection* with the narrative, mainly depending on what is going on, specifically at the end of the episode, throughout a *moving* story able to *echo* their real-life experiences. According to viewers, even in TV series showing extreme content (e.g., *shocking*), mainly *positive emotions* are involved, the prevalent emotions relating to *feelings*, such as *interest*, *desire*, and *attachment*. The *hooking* notion is particularly important in terms of driving TV series watching. Moreover, most participants (6/7) spontaneously reported *persistence* in their watching management in order to achieve this emotional state. As illustration, one participant (1) notably declared having already watched a series for 15 seasons before realizing that he dislikes it. In the same vein, others (6/7) expressed a permanent inclination to *complete* their ongoing season viewing even when they do not really like it, while remaining *up to date* with the release of new episodes. They underlined that such behaviors are empowered with the use of devices, such as mobile applications that display viewers' progress through the season in combination with social networking options.

Entertainment. Furthermore, expectations of having a good time and more generally experiencing *pleasure* seem to play a major role in the overall watching experience. Participants mentioned that they tend to *replay the viewing* of series they have already watched to regain the pleasure previously experienced and to analyze the underlying mechanics of the narrative and storylines, or to *fill a residual gap* in the expectation of new episodes. These are part of what can be conceptualized as a broad spectrum of strategies regarding the preservation of watching pleasure, which includes planning ahead to binge-watch by *scheduling* viewing time, *selecting programs* depending on the time of day and the type of attention required, or even *deferring* viewing until they can obtain the whole season to consume it all at once. Moreover, all participants depicted a global trend to *avoid spoiling risks* in developing proactive attitudes (e.g., waking up at night to catch up with the American live broadcast). *Anticipation* is also

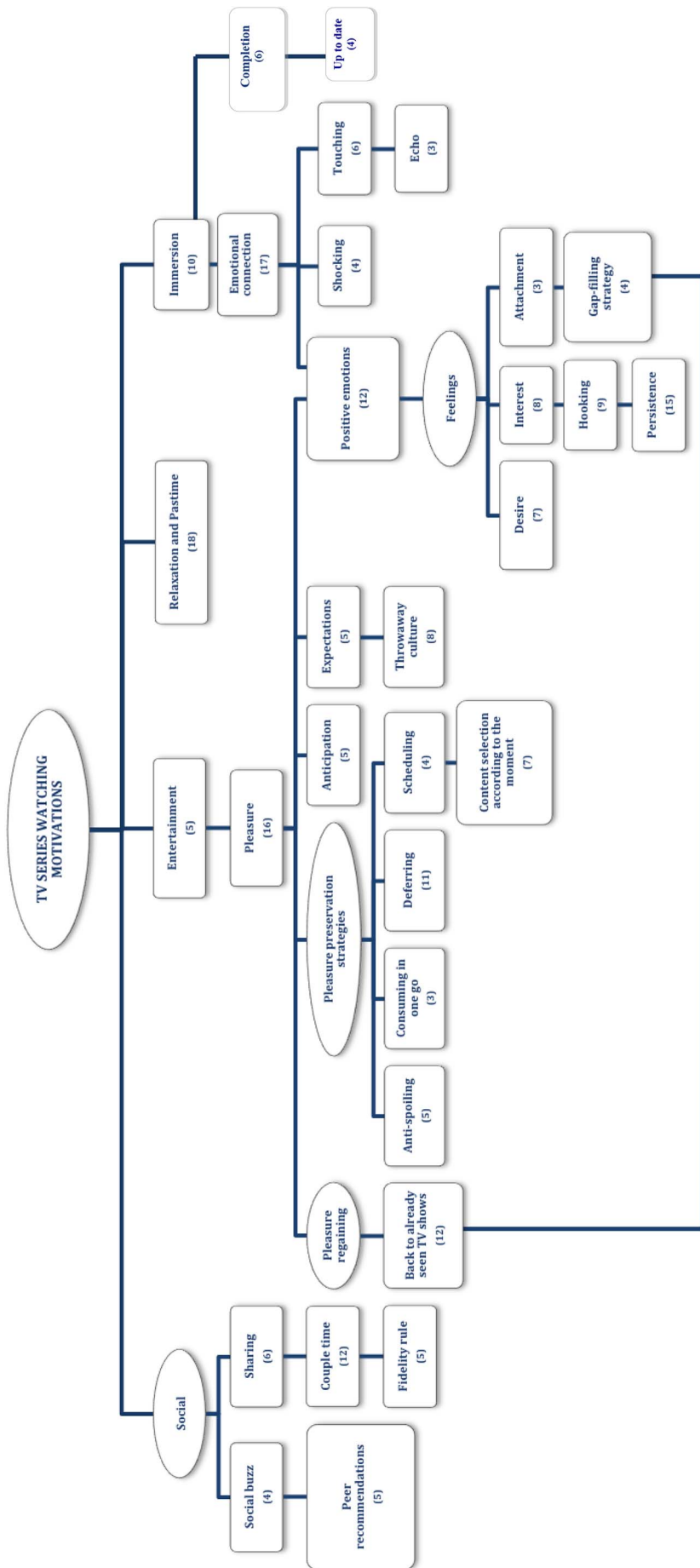


Figure 1. TV series watching motivations (247). Square shapes correspond to the different identified themes and subthemes with the number of related verbatim, whereas round shapes relate to the conceptualizations that make sense between them

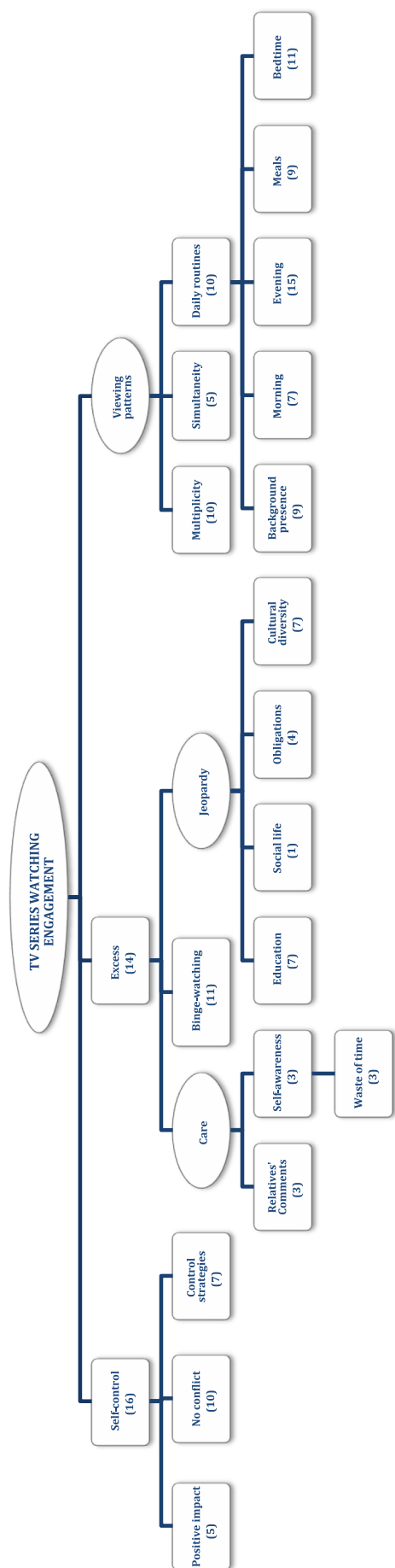


Figure 2. TV series watching engagement (167)

commonplace, participants often being delighted at the thought of watching new episodes, sometimes hurrying up daily tasks to indulge in a hobby for which there are obvious *expectations*. TV series viewers are looking for something, besides, exchanges emphasized the existence of a *throwaway zapping culture* among them.

Social. The focus group also led to the emergence of the *social aspect* of TV series watching as another influential motive. Indeed, examples made it appear that it was a trendy phenomenon sustained by *social buzz* and *peer recommendations*. Participants indicated that TV series provide a topic for discussion, which enables them to keep up with others, *sharing* reactions or impressions, notably in live time, such as during the release of new episodes, which is sometimes considered as an event. Although TV series watching often remains a solitary hobby, it also appeared to be an important way in which some participants (4/7) *spend time with their partner*, for which there is a general sense of *behavioral fidelity*.

TV series watching engagement

Viewing patterns. On the whole, participants displayed a wide extent in viewing practices, mostly watching *several episodes* in a row and following *various shows* in parallel (up to 13 for one participant [2]). Although series are most often watched during the *evening*, many participants (6/7) made it clear that TV series watching tends to be part of each step of the day (e.g., during *breakfast* or *lunch break*, before *bedtime*, and even during daily sport sessions). As a ritual, they integrate series in *daily routines*, and the vast majority (6/7) also indicated putting series on while performing other activities in order to enjoy the *extra noise* in the household or to be able to fall asleep.

Excess. Participants sometimes indulged in viewing in higher doses by watching for a longer time than originally planned. *Binge-watching* takes place irregularly depending on circumstances, but this is not a concern, as most (6/7) reported feeling *able to stop* watching if necessary (as long as they could retain the option to watch later). However, they agreed that limiting themselves to a certain viewing frequency is often complicated, some (5/7) reporting being unable to decrease the habit in general. Participants often appeared concerned about the time they spend watching TV shows, and the majority (6/7) conceded that TV series consumption could be somewhat *too elevated*. They *acknowledged* that they sometimes watch too much and even offered self-justifications with remarks colored with emotion; a few participants (3/7) mentioned that their *relatives* had already questioned their consumption of TV series. Nonetheless, they did not mention any sense of guilt, but rather described a feeling of regret regarding *time wasted*. With the notable exception of a proneness to *postponing daily obligations*, participants *did not identify major negative outcomes* for daily living. In contrast, one participant (4) reported the impairing nature of consequences, such as *missing classes* or *declining outings* with friends. Most of all, they agreed (6/7) that TV series watching encroached on other activities and tended to *reduce the whole area of interests*.

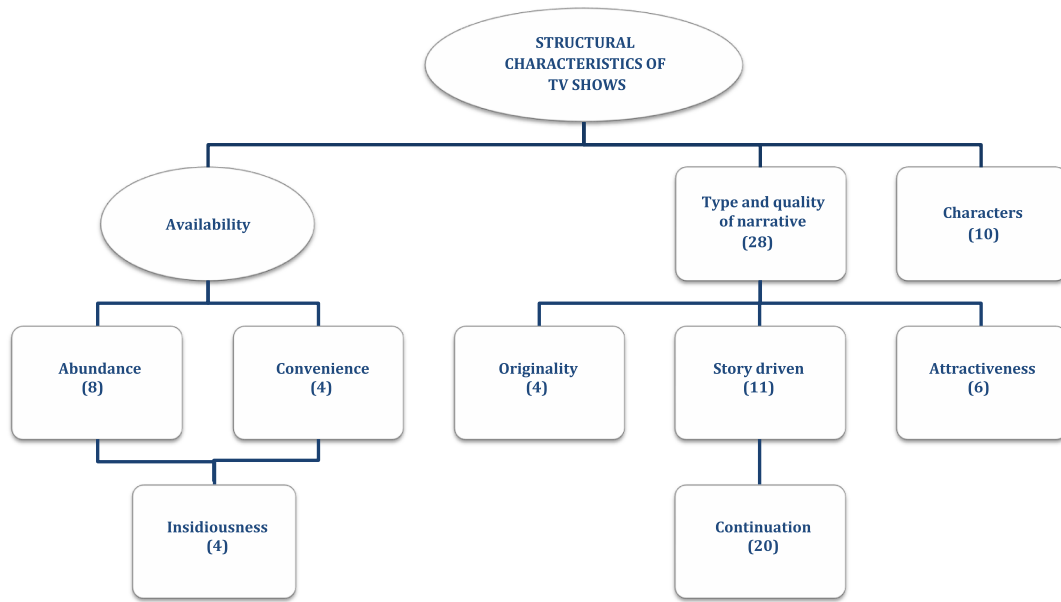


Figure 3. Structural characteristics of TV shows (95)

Table 2. Participants' quotes

Themes	Subthemes	Verbatim	
TV series watching motivations	Immersion	Pastime	(3) "When we have time on our hands"
		Hooking	(1) "You need to be hooked," (3) "In the end, I came unhooked..."
		Persistence	(2) "I keep watching until I feel really hooked," (4) "I don't give up...", (3) "I waited for the click," (5) "We feel disappointed each episode but we continue on the next one telling ourselves 'Come on...'"
		Completion	(4) "We will nonetheless take it to the very end," (5) "I force myself to finish anyway..."
	Entertainment	Gap-filling strategy	(4) "It ever happened to me to start again watching TV shows I already viewed only to re-immense myself in the story and because I miss it," (5) "I start again watching, doing so helps me waiting until new episode," (4) "If I have to wait again one year to discover a new season because the preceding one is over, well... I start again from its very beginning!"
		Content selection	(2) "During mornings or while I'm eating, I select more humorous and relaxing contents," (5) "In the evening, I will rather watch ones I am really hooked by the storyline," (6) "More developed, more modern TV series... Well, I keep these ones for evenings"
		Anticipation	(4) "I am pretty excited 10 min before!," (2) "I am always happy to go back to the story"
	Social	Expectations	(6) "We look for the same type of emotions," (7) "I was disappointed...", (1) "I wasn't happy with that!"
		Throwaway zapping culture	(3) "I try a TV series and if that doesn't work, I will try another one," (5) "When it's over, we will switch to another one"
		Social buzz	(2) "Everyone is talking about it," (6) "I can start a TV series just to understand why people always mention it," (5) "The very popular ones, I will tune in too..."
Peer recommendations		(3) "I am told that I should watch the first two seasons...", (4) "I see I am being asked: By the way, which show would you recommend?"	
	Sharing	(2) "We sometimes text each other while we watch the same show at the same time," (5) "We sometimes plan an evening out to watch it together"	

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued)

Themes		Subthemes	Verbatim
TV series watching engagement		Couple time	(2) "These are small delights we put in place one on one..."
		Fidelity rule	(5) "That became a rule between us, we have no right to discover alone some new episode of TV series we used to watch together," (2) "I didn't cheat, I didn't watch, I waited for him to come back to watch the next episode"
	Excess	Binge-watching	(5) "A 2nd, a 3rd, and I keep watching..." (3) "Each time, I start a new episode..." (4) "I already spent an entire night binging on a show," (2) "I have already screened a whole season in a row"
		Excess	(4) "Well, I already watched 10 episodes today, that's quite a lot," (2) "Yes, I already have 5 episodes to my credit for today..." (5) "I admit, I watch a lot," (2) "Sometimes, I do think to myself that it's a little too much," (6) "Sometimes, we feel that we must limit a bit..." (4) "I realized that I spent one entire year of my life watching TV shows, that's huge!"
		Self-awareness	(6) "It's not okay..." (3) "That does not happen to me very often you know..."
		Relatives' comments	(4) "It took other people to tell me I am addicted..." (2) "Others are always saying I watch way too much..."
		Waste of time	(3) "That was wasted time," (6) "I wasted all this time when I could have done something else..."
		Cultural diversity	(5) "We don't do something else other than watching TV shows, which can be a negative point..." (6) "No negatives consequences generally speaking apart from the fact I don't read anymore," (3) "Before, I used to read a lot of comics and novels, now I replace it by 'Well, I'm gonna watch a series' almost systematically"
		Self-control	Control strategies
			(2) "For example, if I wake up pushed for time in the morning, I deliberately select a show with not that much hooking. I won't watch a Game of Thrones episode because that's just impossible to stop!" (4) "If I plan to go to bed early, I will check my serial is less story-driven, that way I'm not going to crack..."
Structural characteristics of TV shows	Availability	Abundance	(2) "There are so many shows at our disposal!"
		Convenience	(3) "It's so easy, you only have to click on a button and there it is"
		Insidiousness	(2) "This is hyper insidious..."
	Type and quality of narrative	Continuation	(4) "I have to watch what happens next!," (7) "I always find it hard waiting for the rest of the story..."

Self-control. Most participants (6/7) acknowledged that TV series watching can become problematic and potentially have an addictive nature. Interestingly, they recognized TV shows' grip on them and also referred to some *control strategies* implemented to manage potential lack of *self-control*. However, all participants agreed that they have trouble recognizing themselves as a genuine "addict" and argued that they were something like that, but not in the negative sense of the term. Indeed, they were adamant that there was no common measure between the pejorative and stigmatizing connotations resulting from the substance abuse field and their experience of TV series watching. For example, they insisted that they have never shown any sign of withdrawal anxiety with its typical physiological concomitants. They unanimously declared that they do not experience TV series watching as negative, and they preferred mentioning its *positive repercussions*, such as sharing precious moments with loved ones.

Structural characteristics of TV shows

Availability. Because they are exposed to TV series day-to-day thanks to digital devices, participants highlighted the ease of accessibility, *abundance*, and *convenience* of available content as facilitating high consumption and the resulting *insidiousness* of increased watching.

Type and quality of narrative. In addition, the *series type* was also credited with coming into play. More specifically, participants outlined the significance of structural features, such as *program quality* (i.e., complex narratives). TV series must be *attractive* from the very start, displaying *novelty* and keeping viewers interested in the plot all along. Participants clarified that they made certain shows a priority to watch before anything else as soon as they were available. They also noted that *narrative-driven* shows (with a common storyline across episodes) are more engaging, leading them to an overwhelming need to find out *what happens next*.

Characters. Finally, the story *characters* were described as additional contributing factors in the maintenance of TV series watching. Indeed, participants reported that they can form strong attachments to some characters, and thus keep viewing a show, aside from the program quality, just to enjoy their favorite protagonists and follow them through their adventures.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we aimed, by way of exploring the phenomenological characteristics of TV series watching, to highlight the main traits of binge-watching without considering it a priori as an addictive behavior (Billieux et al., 2015; Kardefelt-Winther et al., 2017). Qualitatively exploring the phenomenon, themes, and views expressed through the focus group approach allowed us to point out the inherent characteristics of TV series watching and some of the features that contribute to binge-watching. We first discuss these results in themselves before placing them in the context of existing data on excessive and potentially problematic behaviors in order to challenge the relevance of creating a parallel between binge-watching and the core elements of addiction.

The most prevalent theme by far in the qualitative data obtained pertained to TV series watching motivations, which were distributed over three main axes: entertainment, immersion, and social. Undoubtedly, TV series watching, like any hobby or leisure activity, primarily satisfies the need for entertainment. The current results indicate how emotion elicitation, in particular of positive emotions, constitutes the binding agent of the overall watching experience. In this respect, the results also allowed us to identify a set of specific behaviors focusing on TV series watching, as the focus group showed a common behavioral profile characterized by an organized relationship to viewing pleasure, based on a broad variety of management strategies. The viewers are purposefully watching and seeking certain positive emotional states with some precise peaks within the viewing experience (e.g., being hooked by the story). The motivations for engaging in recreational appetitive behaviors have already been shown to be involved in their onset and continuation (Billieux et al., 2013; Chen & Pang, 2012; Jansanem & Berna, 2017; Kuntsche & Kuntsche, 2009; Lannoy, Billieux, Poncin, & Maurage, 2017; Maraz, Király, Urbán, Griffiths, & Demetrovics, 2015; Wéry & Billieux, 2016). Interestingly, some overlaps between those and TV series watching motivations deserve emphasis. First, emotion-focused motives have also been shown in video gaming (Yee, 2006), whereby users derive salient emotional experiences and, more specifically, arousal (Sherry, Greenberg, Lucas, & Lachlan, 2006) or enhancement of feelings of well-being and positive affects (Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006). Such enhancement motives have also been identified in sport activities (Jansanem & Berna, 2017), notably dancing (Maraz et al., 2015), as well as in gambling behaviors (Devos et al., 2017; Lambe, Mackinnon, & Stewart, 2015; McGrath, Stewart, Klein, & Barrett, 2010). Furthermore, it has been suggested that gamblers with high levels of enhancement motives are also

characterized as gambling for the “high” and its related excitement feelings (Bonnaire, Bungener, & Varescon, 2009; Ledgerwood & Petry, 2006, 2010; Stewart, Zack, Collins, Klein, & Fragopoulos, 2008; Turner, Jain, Spence, & Zangeneh, 2008; Vachon & Bagby, 2009) in a similar manner to that of sportsmen who seek arousal through spectatorship (Kahle & Riley, 2004) and through participation in extreme sports (Brymer & Mackenzie, 2017; Kerr, 1991; Lipscombe, 1999). Moreover, as the driving vector for all of this emotional experience, the immersive aspect of TV series watching is not isolated but is a constitutive part of other media-based leisure, such as video gaming (Billieux et al., 2013; Yee, 2006). Several shared features with the immersion component of Yee’s taxonomy of video gaming motives (Yee, 2007) can be underlined. For example, the discovery and learning aspects of video game worlds (Yee, Ducheneaut, & Nelson, 2012) are somewhat reminiscent of how viewers can find out about the fictional worlds of new TV series. To a certain extent, this may also recall the intellectual benefits or learning aspects that can be derived from leisure activities as a whole (Beggs & Elkins, 2010) whereby one is widening one’s experience and horizon. Still, the narrative features of video games (Yee, 2006, 2007; Yee et al., 2012) remain the main characteristic in common with TV series watching, and the role of storytelling has equally been observed as a means of immersing the player in the video game (King, Delfabbro, & Griffiths, 2010b). Other linkages can easily be made with the escapism motives of individuals who engage in leisure to stop thinking about daily life problems, to relax, or to avoid boredom (Beggs & Elkins, 2010). In this respect, a previous investigation of binge-watching from a use and gratification perspective (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015) already established this relaxation aspect, alongside engagement and hedonism, as the main gratification of subsequent viewing. However, dysfunctional coping (e.g., problem-alleviating expectations, emotional coping, or stress reduction), which has previously been described in relation to various excessive or problematic versions of behaviors, including video game play (Yee, 2006, 2007), gambling (Binde, 2013; Devos et al., 2017; Wu, Tao, Tong, & Cheung, 2012), cybersex (Cooper, Griffin-Shelley, Delmonico, & Mathy, 2001; Wéry & Billieux, 2016), alcohol consumption (Kuntsche, Knibbe, Gmel, & Engels, 2006; Kuntsche & Kuntsche, 2009; Terlecki & Buckner, 2015), and eating (Markey & Vander Wal, 2007; Munsch, Meyer, Quartier, & Wilhelm, 2012; Polivy & Herman, 1993), did not emerge at all in the focus group. This leads to the proposal that TV series watching, at least based on the answers gathered in the current focus group, is definitively on the “savoring” side, and therefore leads us to suggest that binge-watching could centrally be an activity serving to enhance or maintain positive affect. Such a view can be strongly supported by mood management theory, the general assumption of which posits that selective media exposure is driven by mood optimization, with motivation not only to terminate or alleviate a negative affective state, but also to preserve and intensify a positive affect (Reinecke, 2016). To serve these hedonistic goals, individuals intuitively rearrange their environment in a way that maximizes positive affect. Notably, the data collected from our focus group, which particularly emphasized a set

of pleasure preservation strategies (e.g., binge-watching scheduling and program selection) among viewers, falls completely within such conceptualization. Further concepts of mood management theory are also particularly meaningful here, such as telic hedonism (i.e., the acceptance of unpleasant affective states in the interest of subsequent hedonic gratifications or long-term hedonic goals); individuals may be willing to delay immediate hedonic pleasure if they anticipate that this will ultimately lead to even greater hedonic gratification (Reinecke, 2016), which is precisely what viewers admitted to doing when they reported in the focus group that they tend to defer viewing a series until they can obtain the whole season to consume it all at once. Coming back to Yee's taxonomy, other comparable features with drivers of TV series watching can be discernible. As illustration, it is tempting to think that the interest displayed in analyzing the underlying rules and mechanics of games (Yee, 2007) is similar to that of the viewers' interest in narrative and storylines. Better yet, the advancement and progression aspect of gaming (Yee, 2007) could be associated with the inclination to complete the season viewing in TV series watching, despite the frequent lack of enjoyment. Regarding this latter point, the notion of "unenjoyable" has also been explored more broadly in video gaming (King & Delfabbro, 2009) and gambling (Blaszczynski, McConaghy, & Frankova, 1990), with people persisting in these activities despite being bored or no longer enjoying the activity. Finally, the social nature of TV series watching, which emerged as an acting and sustaining parallel factor from the analysis, finds also some similarities with other recreational behaviors. Most important, socialization motives (e.g., facilitate social ties) have already been shown to play a role in sports participation (Kerr & Mackenzie, 2012) and, more broadly, in leisure activities (Beggs & Elkins, 2010; Chen & Pang, 2012), with the notable examples of gambling (Binde, 2013; Clarke et al., 2007; Lam, 2007; Lee, Chae, Lee, & Kim, 2007; McGrath et al., 2010) and video game play (Griffiths, Davies, & Chappell, 2004; King & Delfabbro, 2009; Yee, 2006; Yee et al., 2012). Interestingly, game playing was additionally credited as a way for users to share quality time with their romantic partner or family members (Yee, 2006), just as TV series watching is, according to the focus group. However, the kind of conformity pressure (resulting from social buzz and peer recommendations) portrayed in exchanges might also be connected, to a lesser degree, to the well-known conformity motives seen in the literature on excessive behaviors (Cooper, 1994; Kuntsche & Kuntsche, 2009; Kuntsche et al., 2006; McGrath et al., 2010), indicating the need for a psychosocial account of problematic behaviors (Suissa, 2014; Van der Linden, 2015).

TV series watching engagement was the second most referred to topic and was divided into three subthemes: viewing patterns, excess, and control. On the whole, results highlighted that for participants who regularly watch TV series, this activity constitutes an important and constitutive part of their everyday life. Highly present day-to-day, TV series appear to be "companions" involved in routines all day long, a companionship aspect that is also displayed in video game play, based on the understanding that certain elements of video games may make them attractive as social

companions (King, Delfabbro, & Griffiths, 2010a; Selnow, 1984). It is in this context that the notions of excessive watching and control over binge-watching arose from the analysis. Centrally, however, even though some participants were self-admitted TV series addicts and conceded that TV series consumption could be somewhat excessive and involve loss of control to a certain degree, they made it clear not only that TV series watching is far from the classic substance-related withdrawal experience in the case of viewing interruption, but it is also clearly not perceived as negative. Moreover, the amount of time spent watching does not seem to be a relevant indicator of excessive TV series watching, given the episodic nature of binge-watching, which most often takes place irregularly depending on the context. These statements reflect the existing questioning in the field, where it remains difficult to draw a line between healthy and unhealthy engagement in a given behavior or leisure activity. Continuing with the video gaming example, it has already been suggested that some of the core addiction criteria simply tap into high engagement, rather than testify about addictive involvement (Charlton, 2002; Charlton & Danforth, 2007; Griffiths, 2010). Besides, longitudinal analyses showed that high involvement in video gaming, as in other behaviors (e.g., excessive exercising, sexual behaviors, shopping, online chatting, or eating), tends to be fairly transient (Konkolý Thege, Woodin, Hodgins, & Williams, 2015; Rothmund, Klimmt, & Gollwitzer, 2016) and, in the case of video gaming, is not necessarily associated with negative daily life consequences (Billieux et al., 2013), which remains until now the most adequate differentiating factor between excess use and addiction (Griffiths, 2010; Sánchez-Carbonell, Beranuy, Castellana, Chamarro, & Oberst, 2008). Furthermore, it has been emphasized that one needs to consider the person's daily life context (familial, sentimental, and professional circumstances) in which the behavior takes place when assuming an individual potential video game addiction (Griffiths, 2010).

The last salient dimension was related to the structural characteristics of TV shows, the analysis of which emphasized three main facets: availability, type and quality of narrative, and characters. As mentioned in the content analysis results, participants clearly communicated about how the structural characteristics of TV series may stimulate viewing maintenance and lead to binge-watching. In the same way, empirical research to date has suggested that the structural characteristics of gambling activities and video games have an influential role in the initiation and maintenance of these behaviors (Deleuze, Christiaens, Nuyens, & Billieux, 2017; King et al., 2010a; Parke & Griffiths, 2007; Ryan et al., 2006). Regarding TV series, participants first underlined the permanent accessibility of a large variety of content through the Internet. Furthermore, it has been widely claimed that Internet use seems to have a facilitating effect on a range of activities, such as gaming (King et al., 2010b; Yee, 2006, 2007), pornography use (Wéry & Billieux, 2016), and gambling (Gainsbury, 2015; Griffiths & Barnes, 2008; McCormack & Griffiths, 2013). Clearly, the present characteristics of TV series are highly similar to those described in the "Triple-A" model (Cooper, Scherer, Boies, & Gordon, 1999) regarding online sexual activities (accessibility, affordability, and anonymity).

Exchanges emphasized the type of TV series that can vary in their addictive potential and thus imply different kinds of motives, expectations, and related attitudes among viewers, just as in video gaming (Deleuze et al., 2017; King et al., 2009; Yee, 2007) or gambling (Binde, 2013; Devos et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2012). The qualitative analysis conducted underscored that recent TV shows have become much more complex, immersive, and engaging from a storytelling point of view. The present results indicated that TV series watching is not addictive per se, but that certain TV shows appear to be highly addictive. On this point, it has rightly been noted that there may be various structural features of video games that make them “addictive” as well (Brown, 1989; Johansson & Gotestam, 2004); interestingly, the storytelling facet that games have in common with TV series is one of the most notable. But the comparison goes beyond this, as these generally highly enjoyed narrative elements must also involve complex storylines and multiple characters to play a role in sustaining interest and motivation to play (Kahn et al., 2015; King et al., 2010a; Ryan et al., 2006; Yee, 2006). The matter of characters, more specifically attachment to the characters, came through in the focus group, reflecting the emotional investment that viewers placed in these stories. There was a consensus on how this may constitute an additional driving force and an extra supportive factor in continued viewing. The fact that attachment is of great significance is consistent with previous evidence suggesting that, based on the assumption that some players formed “electronic friendships” with their game machines in gaming (Selnow, 1984), it was possible that avatar attachment represents a more sophisticated form of this friendship (King et al., 2010b). Indeed, TV series viewers seem to have close relationships with their favorite protagonists, possibly characterized by the same ingredients as those involved in players’ relationships with their game avatars (emotional connection with the character; Blinka, 2008).

Finally, considering binge-watching in the light of the symptom-based components model of addiction (Griffiths, 2005) may lead to evocative links with core addiction criteria and the overall patterns of compulsive substance use. For example, participants spend a great deal of time with TV series (watching it, rating it on mobile applications, and looking for additional details or for new shows), and their close relatives sometimes notice this strong involvement. Many participants also mentioned that they watch for longer periods than originally intended at times, and that, despite recurring efforts, TV series watching was not reduced and persisted over time. A persistence dimension could likely be deduced from some viewing behaviors, such as the inclination to keep watching in order to achieve a desired effect (e.g., being hooked), or to keep viewing although not interested (e.g., just to complete the ongoing season viewing). Along similar lines, other viewing behaviors may call for attention, such as when viewers watch former TV series so as to regain its effects or to fill a residual gap. Most of all, TV series watching tends to invade leisure time, encroaching on other recreational activities, and reducing other interests. Nonetheless, our data suggest that counting binge-watching as a genuine addiction is

unsuitable despite these similar aspects. First, even though TV series viewers reported an impact on daily life, the latter was restricted in scope for most of them. Except for one of the participants, no significant impairment or distress was reported. Similarly, the majority of participants claimed that they successfully exert control over consumption even though commonly there are unsuccessful attempts to decrease the habit. They also reported being able to abstain from watching relatively easily provided they could watch later. Thus, even though some clear connections could be established with substance addiction criteria, such parallelism appeared insufficient because of the numerous distinctive facets that also emerged.

The results of this study corroborate those of other investigations (Feeney, 2014; Jenner, 2015; Matrix, 2014; Mikos, 2016; Pittman & Sheehan, 2015) that explored the main characteristics and viewer profiles of TV series watching. Theoretical saturation was not reached in this study, however, because only a single focus group was established and thus limitations must be considered. Nonetheless, these preliminary data confirm that binge-watching is a multi-determined and heterogeneous phenomenon that should not a priori be analyzed through the lens of the biomedical model of addiction. Other important points highlighted by this study are that there are definitive behavioral effects regarding TV series watching and that specific determinants drive specific behaviors and persistent watching. Above all, the data fundamentally provide researchers with the conviction that studies can focus on “behavioral analysis” (James & Tunney, 2016), examining the proposed behavior itself and the reasons that it may be indulged in to excess, rather than systematically seeking a behavioral addiction label from the outset by adopting the widespread confirmatory approach. Indeed, the latter perspective may result in “the identification of an unlimited list of new behavioral addictions” (Billieux et al., 2015, p. 119) and might even ultimately bring discredit to the behavioral addiction research field as leading to a deleterious impact on both the theoretical understanding of these emerging and potentially problematic conditions and the related clinical practice. Applying standardized interventions that prove efficient to treat addictive disorders in these new “pathological” conditions, in the absence of definitive evidence about whether they constitute a genuine addiction or not, is not only irrelevant but also hazardous. Thus, even though our results allow the identification of a plurality of precise factors (e.g., contextual, motivational, emotional, social, and structural) involved in this leisure activity, it remains essential to continue updating binge-watching intrinsic properties and related factors, disentangling relationships between them, to elaborate possible conceptualizations about this phenomenon. Above all, the present topic warrants further investigation to elicit and analyze the key psychological processes involved in binge-watching.

This study allowed us to identify a plurality of specific factors involved in binge-watching and, more broadly, in TV series watching. Relying extensively on the classic biomedical and psychological models of addictive behaviors to account for binge-watching would have thus led us to miss a genuine approach to the topic by leaving

aside its specificities. Finally, we aimed to contribute to the debate relative to the prevailing trend in pathologizing everyday behaviors and leisure activities in behavioral addiction research, postulating that, beyond binge-watching, there is a strong need for further qualitative studies to examine excessive manifestations of everyday behaviors or leisure activities that have been a priori proposed to reflect addictive disorders. Indeed, an examination of their unique phenomenological characteristics and symptoms is required to generate the first steps toward an adequate theoretical rationale in order to understand these emerging problematic behaviors.

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APPENDIX: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GRID

1. We have asked you to first complete some items that will serve to create and validate questionnaires for research purposes. What did you think about it? Do you have any comments or suggestions to make to help us improve the draft as it stands?
2. What are your watching habits and practices regarding TV series?
3. Why do you indulge in TV series watching? What is the expected effect? What are the most important criteria in your TV show selections?
4. Which type of emotions do you generally experience during the viewing of an episode? How does this make you feel?
5. How do you feel right after watching an episode? What would you say it brought to you?
6. Do you generally keep control over your viewing sessions? Could you describe this?
7. Has TV series watching already had effects on you or your daily life? Could you describe this?
8. Do you sometimes consider yourself as a “TV series addict”? If yes, how does that manifest itself concretely?