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Binge Watching: Exploring the Relationship of Binge Watched Television Genres and Colleges



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Communication, Technology, and Society

ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationship between students' area of study at Clemson University and their choice in binge watched programming. This article focuses on the uses and gratifications theory to explain that individuals have different motivations for viewing particular media, such as television genres. This article examines how area of study and gender can influence individuals' preferences of binge watched television content. In addition, this article discusses how the combination of online-streaming options and viewers personal television consumption preferences have resulted in an increase in overall binge watching habits. The study was conducted through an online survey using convenience sampling. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test the significance of differences. The ANOVA reported the difference in gender for preference of binge watching fantasy genres was ($F(1,38) = 4.431, p = .042$), therefore the results were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. In regards to the College of Engineering and Sciences the correlation resulted with Drama ($F(4,35) = 2.228, p = .086$) and Fantasy ($F(4,35) = 1.821, p = .147$) both approaching significance.

INTRODUCTION

Binge watching has become a prominent trend, especially amongst Millennials. Binge watching or sometimes referred to as binge viewing is defined as "watching multiple episodes or seasons of a show in one sitting" (Binge Watching, 2014). Although there is debate over how many episodes constitutes a binge, the standard definition is usually: "4-5 episodes of an hour long series and 6-7 for half hour series" (Binge Watching, 2014). Although the term has been around for almost a decade, binge watching "reached a new level of recognition in 2013" as a result of online streaming services providing their own original content (Annalect, 2014, p. 2). Online-streaming services are portals for viewers to immerse themselves in hours of endless content. Producers and services are noticing the effects of binge watching; binge watching "is transforming the way people watch television and changing the economics of the industry" (Jurgensen, 2012). The producer-consumer dynamic is shifting, therefore it is important to explore viewer preferences and habits. My research question stems from the uses and gratifications theory; the theory explains that individuals find media that provides them with particular gratifications. Individuals have different motivations for viewing particular media, such as television genres (Harwood, 1999). Certain factors can influence individuals' preferences, which may originate at the individual level or the interpersonal level (Harwood, 1999) This study examined gender and college major as factors that may affect binge watching preferences.

METHODS

For the purpose of this study I conducted an online survey and distributed it to Clemson University Students. I distributed the survey link via social media, e-mail, and asked participants to pass it on to other students. Participants were asked to record their biological sex, major at Clemson, and indicate if they had binge watched any of the listed shows. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 24; this age demographic is a portion of the millennial age group who are the most prominent binge watching group (Annalect, 2014, p.5). Clemson University is a good representative for this study because binge watching viewers are more likely to be a millennial and from the South (Annalect, 2014, p.5). The genres for this study were selected based upon Internet Movie Database's (IMDb) current list of most popular TV shows (Most Popular TV Series, 2014). The genres are: Action, Comedy, Crime, Drama, and Fantasy. The shows, corresponding accordingly, were: Arrow, *The Big Bang Theory*, *Sons of Anarchy*, *The Walking Dead*, and *Game of Thrones*. Annalect's Binge Watching survey also reported *The Walking Dead*, *Game of Thrones*, and *The Big Bang Theory* to be some of the most binge watched television shows (Annalect, 2014, p.16). I asked the participants to provide their majors, then from the data collected I sorted the majors of participants into appropriate colleges.

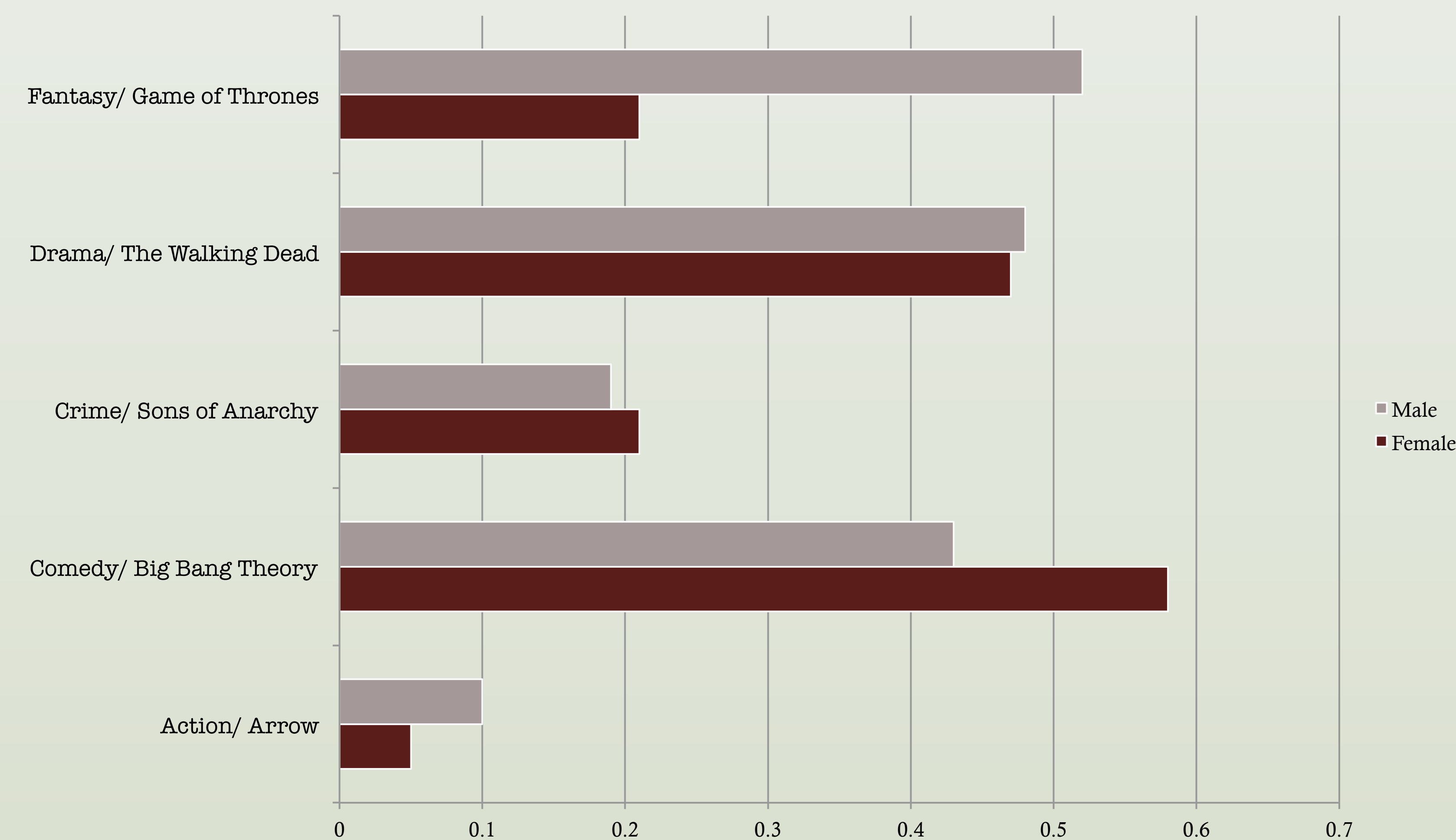
Survey

1. What is your biological sex? Male or Female
2. What is your major at Clemson?
3. Have you binge watched the Big Bang Theory? Yes or No
4. Have you binge watched Arrow? Yes or No
5. Have you binge watched Game of Thrones? Yes or No
6. Have you binge watched Sons of Anarchy? Yes or No
7. Have you binge watched The Walking Dead? Yes or No

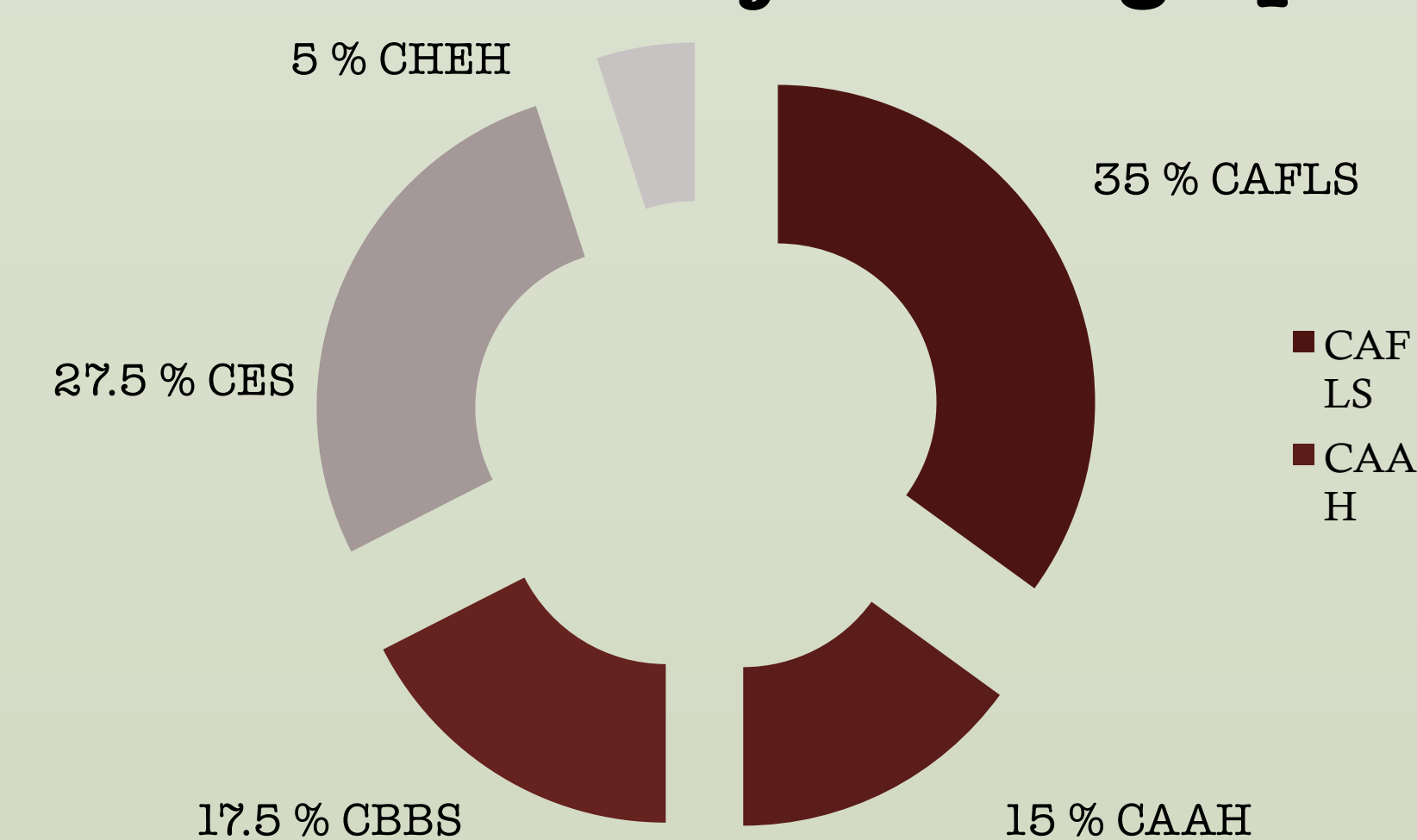
RESULTS

Forty participants were surveyed; 19 (47.5%) participants were female and 21 (52.5%) male. The participants were not equally representative of the colleges. Of the colleges there were 14 (35%) from CAFLS, 6 (15%) from CAAH, 7 (17.5%) from CBBS, 11(27.5%) from CES, and 2 (5%) from CHEH. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test the significance of differences between female and male television show genre preferences as well as differences in preferences amongst the five colleges of Clemson University. The ANOVA reported the difference in gender for preference of binge watching fantasy genres was statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. This was determined by a one-way ANOVA ($F(1,38) = 4.431, p = .042$), revealing more males prefer Fantasy genres than females. There was not a significant relationship between females and genres of binge watched television shows. Although there was not a significant relationship between college and genre select categories were approaching significance. In regards to the College of Engineering and Sciences the correlation resulted with Drama ($F(4,35) = 2.228, p = .086$) and Fantasy ($F(4,35) = 1.821, p = .147$) both approaching significance. Specifically, the results suggest that the correlation between genre and biological sex is more significant than the correlation between genre and college.

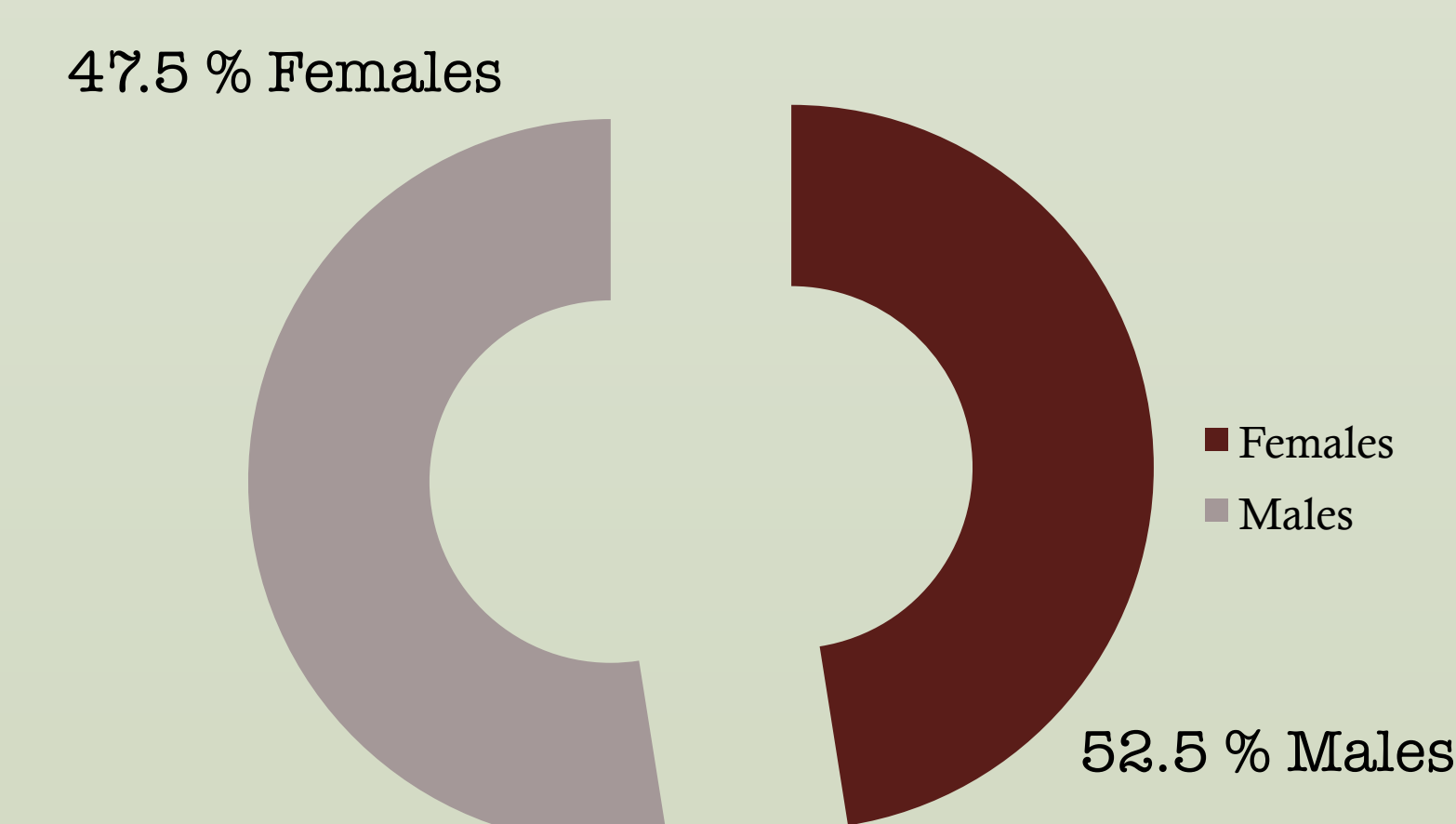
Genres



Major Demographics



Participants



CONCLUSIONS

This study extends the literature of binge watching by exploring the demographics of binge watchers in relation to preference of binge watched programming. This study could contribute information to media effect studies, online streaming services, and the television production realm. If the study were expanded the information could be applied by online streaming services to either create more audience specific shows or target audience members by increasing their suggested shows list. For example, Netflix created both season-released television shows *House of Cards* (drama) and *Orange Is The New Black* (comedy). These two season-released shows are crafted to be binge watched television shows; comedies and dramas are the top most binge watched genres (Annalect, 2014, p.16). Netflix could capitalize on these shows by crafting their suggested show lists to the type of viewer. Since "over half of all binge- viewers discover new programs through bingeing" it's beneficial for online- streaming services to suggest content that will sustain their binge watching habits and keep the user captivated (Annalect, 2014, p. 8). Netflix already suggests television shows based upon what other users who are watching that specific show are also watching, however an individualized suggestion list could more accurately target the viewer. This hyper-individualized tactic would enable Netflix to create "niche audiences" (Jenner, 2014, p. 14). Individualized target marketing would expand upon the features online streaming services have already started to build upon, such as using a hyper-serialized format or season-released shows. For example, if males prefer season-released shows and fantasy genres, then Netflix could suggest shows similar to *Game of Thrones* that have all the episodes available, such as *Lost*. Both *Game of Thrones* and *Lost* are considered to have cult followings; therefore Netflix could suggest shows with similar "cult" followings (Most Popular TV Series, 2014). Although certain television shows have been aimed at targeting specific demographics, the information from this study could contribute to the conversation and provide producers with insight on the audience members their show is not reaching.

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