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How does genre preference influence the importance of film marketing mix elements: evidence during the COVID-19 pandemics

Dejana Nikolic, Milica Kostic-Stankovic and Veljko Jeremic

Faculty of Organizational Sciences (UB-FOS), University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to propose a conceptual model which will unveil how fans of different film genres observe the importance of elements of marketing mix when consuming products in the film industry during COVID-19 pandemics. To verify the proposed conceptual model, a survey was conducted during the lockdown and the responses of 1606 individuals from Serbia, who declare themselves as film fans, were analyzed using structural equation modelling analysis. The results support the assumption that the respondents who prefer different film genres give different importance to elements of the film marketing mix. Our findings show that based on the genre of the film marketing activities can be tailored so as to improve their effects, especially during the pandemics and post-pandemics period. It is believed that the herein presented research could initiate further research on the issue of modelling marketing activities in the film industry based on consumers' genre preference and behavior.

1. Introduction

In general, creative industries are understood to be a set of economic activities that use creativity, ability, and talent of individuals to potentially create economic value through the exploitation of intellectual property (Fahmi et al., 2016). In the last few decades, we are witnessing an increasing importance of creative industries in both employment and revenues (Jones et al., 2015). According to data, between 2012 and 2014, even despite the global economic crisis, creative industries increased profits by 3.2% and exports by 4.3% (Boccella & Salerno, 2016). Also, the creative class in the US and leading EU member states makes up more than 25% of the total workforce (Florida & Tinagli, 2004). However, it is expected that the COVID-19 pandemics will have and already has a detrimental effect on creative industries in general (Comunian & England, 2020).

CONTACT Dejana Nikolic ✉ dejana.nikolic@fon.bg.ac.rs

The specific creative industry which we focus on in this study is the film industry. The film industry is considered as an important creative industry, given that it is an industry whose products and services are primarily based on creativity and intellectual capital (King, 2007). Also, in the film industry we have a specificity regarding individuals' expertise constituting an important identity trait which fuels cultural capital, especially in commercial film-making (Pluntz & Pras, 2020). On the other hand, previous studies have found that the promotion of the film industry could help the growth of GDP, add value to related industries, increase employment, cultural consumption, citizen's awareness and social and cultural inclusion (Huang, 2020).

Due to COVID-19 lockdown and social distancing measures both the process of filmmaking and distribution have been disrupted. According to Blackall's interviews (2021) getting and maintaining work in the film industry during COVID-19 has been extremely hard as the budgets are cut and filming of films and TV shows stopped or has been delayed indefinitely. Nevertheless, there are signals and impulses of recovery in the British film industry after dialog and introduction of guidelines and protocols which slowly allowed the production (Ravindran, 2021). Regarding film distribution, the most iconic places of film consumption, cinemas, have been closed, or if not closed, are void, due to fear of catching the virus. As never before, the consumers turned to online streaming services. Netflix added 15 million subscribers, twice as more as they expected (Alexander, 2020). What worries the streaming services the most is will the subscription continue after the lockdown and how to retain the new subscribers.

According to Durie (1993) film marketing has the goal to maximize the audience for a film and therefore its earning potential. Most market success is enjoyed by those companies whose market share is growing, whose offer is continuously adjusted to the customers' needs while ensuring a high level of consumer care and communication with and within the target market (Wysokinska, 2003). Although it sounds easy to do so, the reality is quite the opposite. In film industry there is a complex marketing process from new product development (developing the idea of the film), through the production phase, to distribution and exhibition (Kerrigan & Özbilgin, 2004). Additionally, there is a strong need understand the consumers' preferences to tailor the right communication strategy with them.

The most visible parts of the film marketing process are the last stages related to communication and bringing the film to the audiences' attention. So far, most of the research done in this field is related to box office predictions (for example King, 2007; Liu, 2006). Nevertheless, the importance of elements of film marketing mix defined by Kerrigan (2010) should be more closely observed. Research related to film marketing mix is a latecomer to the arts marketing literature. Throughout the 1990s research papers on consumer behavior constituted the majority of it, while in the past decade, the contributions on elements of film marketing mix have grown (Hume, 2008; Colbert & St-James, 2014). To better define the film marketing mix, we will first define the original marketing mix. Marketing mix, also known as the Four Ps, is probably the most famous marketing term. Its elements (product, price, place and promotion) are the fundamental and tactical components of a marketing plan. Many authors argue that understanding the customer attitude toward 4Ps marketing

mix is important. Also, the design of marketing mix determines how the company will compete in target markets (Kramoliš & Kopečková, 2013). Constantinides (2006) emphasizes that marketing mix is a framework of the dominant marketing management paradigm to identify market development, environmental changes and trends. Several studies confirm that the 4Ps is indeed the trusted conceptual platform of practitioners dealing with operational marketing issues (Coviello et al., 2000). The wide acceptance of the 4Ps among field marketers is the result of their profound exposure to this concept during college years, since identifying the 4Ps as the controllable parameters is likely to influence the consumer buying process and decisions (Shahhosseini & Ardahaey, 2011). Linking film marketing and the development of the film marketing process to mainstream marketing theory, 'film marketing mix' consists of the core elements which must be considered by filmmakers and definitely by film marketers. These elements (creative team, actors, script/genre, age classification and release strategy; Kerrigan, 2010) can act as signals to the film consumer which can help them to evaluate the film prior to consumption. Mohammadian and Habibi (2012) pointed out when it comes to film industry to discover influential factors – film marketing mix is the core in attracting audiences to cinema and prioritizing these factors.

It is important to highlight the fact that previous studies have investigated the impact of numerous elements of film marketing mix on film revenue prediction, with not so satisfying results. The uncertainties of film box-office revenues can be linked to the production and distribution of movies, genre, actors, budgets, and many more factors. The majority of the past studies made predictions based solely on easily accessible film budgets, or by referring to market performances of similar films in history (Ahmad et al., 2020). Such a result indicated there is a need to go beyond film budget as the only predictor. An accurate prediction is highly valuable for advertisement companies that seek to embed their ads in popular film. The ability to predict and better understand the factors which lead to the film's success also affects the marketing activities decision-making and has been a major research focus in the film industry (Zhou & Yen, 2018). However, the task is incredibly challenging as a film's performance is affected by a lot of complex aspects (Wang et al., 2020). It is important to stress out the conclusion of De Vany and Walls (1999) who said that uncertainty of creative industries is implicit in the whole process of generating "creativity." Therefore, analytical approach and modelling based on data analysis is recommended to better understand the interrelation between the elements of film marketing mix and the factors which impact their importance (Simonton, 2009).

The question which has especially attracted our attention is how to measure and explore the impact of genre preference on the importance of film marketing mix elements. It is believed that consumers who prefer specific film genre display specific behaviour in terms of attention and importance they address to promotion, people in the film, origin, and others. In this vein, we addressed the topic genre impact on consumer behaviour and strived to observe whether such impact exists, what direction does it have, and is it statistically significant. The purpose of this study is to create and test a conceptual model to answer the theoretical relationships between 10 different genres and several elements of film marketing mix and characteristics of film.

The proposed model attempts to integrate several concepts, improve the currently devised models and fill in the gaps in the film marketing literature.

Our study will rely on combining the conceptualization of the importance of various elements of film marketing mix for proposing adequate marketing activities in film industry during COVID-19 pandemics. Previous studies have dealt with the direct and indirect impact of the marketing mix construction in an integrated framework, while we have decided to create a conceptual model that would include film genre as the predictor of the importance of elements of film marketing mix in the home setting during lockdown. This study aims to comprehensively show the integrated influence of genre on elements of the film marketing mix. Also, it aims to shed light on the consumers' attitudes and behavior after the COVID-19 pandemics started.

Film marketing managers are put in front of a daunting task how to communicate and present the film to the audience and on which elements of the film marketing mix to focus on, especially nowadays when the film industry is facing tremendous changes and challenges. The aim of this paper is to enlarge the current body of knowledge on the complex mechanism of factors which impact on the audiences' decision-making process to consume a film and the importance of individual elements of film marketing mix. The additional value of the paper, besides the conceptual model, are the results of the empirical survey on 1,606 respondents, conducted to test the model. It is hoped that the proposed model and its results might shed light on specific elements which impact the success in the context of film viewing during COVID-19. In doing so, the model could provide insights to decision makers on how to tailor their marketing activities and better adapt to changed consumers.

The outline of the paper is as follows. In the second section, the importance of genre preference in shaping marketing activities in the film industry is explored. Next, a proposal for the conceptualization of a marketing management model is presented, as well as the associated hypotheses. To verify the proposed conceptual model, a survey was conducted and structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed on the collected data. In the following section, we outline the research methodology. In the fifth section the obtained results on the verification of the proposed model in the film industry are provided. We finish our paper with discussion, concluding remarks, implications of the study, noticed limitations of the study and future directions of the study.

2. The role of genre in shaping marketing activities

In order to conceptualize the conceptual model, the next part of the paper analyses how different authors observe the impact of the genre in the context of shaping marketing activities in general and during COVID-19.

2.1. The role of genre in shaping marketing activities

When producing a film, studios face a myriad of decisions, an important one being the genre of the film (Desai & Basuroy, 2005). The genre plays an important role in

the potential popularity of a film, and the most popular genres include: action films, thrillers, horror films, comedies and dramas. The relative popularity of a certain genre varies over time, which conditions the constant need of marketing experts to assess which genre will attract the greatest attention of the audience at a given moment (Prag & Casavant, 1994).

Lena and Peterson (2008) highlighted the fact that genre is a conceptual tool most often used to classify varieties of cultural products, particularly in the fields of visual art, popular culture, video games, film, literature, and music. As van Venrooij and Shmutz van Venrooij and Schmutz, van Venrooij and Schmutz, (2018) mention in their study, genre categories facilitate marketing experts to delineate markets and better understand the taste patterns of consumers. The genre also enables critics to compare and evaluate cultural objects.

Preferences for the genre are developed by creating an interest in the content associated with the genre itself and it is built over time with facing similar content over and over again (Kamalesh et al., 2019). Moon et al. (2010) pointed out that viewers' preferences can develop into lasting and stable interests, such as favourite genres. A filmgoer chooses a particular film based on their genre preference because they expect that the preference will fulfil an entertainment desire. Therefore, the filmgoer receives the benefit of having its desire fulfilled (Hixson, 2006). The study by Matthes (2015) emphasized that different people have different taste and preference for films. Nalabandian and Ireland provide an extensive literature review on how genre preference affects consumers' behaviour related to learning about the central plot of the film, film consumption, and attitudes towards the film as a whole. Audiences become familiar with genres and associate specific features with specific genres. This means that once a film's genre is known, this piece of information on its own can trigger specific thoughts in a film-goer's mind about the type of film they are going to see (Gunter, 2018).

According to Redfern (2012) understanding audiences' preferences for certain types of films is a priority for film producers and distributors as this is a factor in determining which films to produce and how to market them effectively. He also indicated that genre is an important, if not the most important, factor in decision making for audiences about which film to watch.

Pluntz and Pras (2020) pointed out mastering the art of correct film-making entails a large degree of genre specialization. This is more evident when considering that macro and meso forces sometimes dictate which genres have greater value. For instance, in the French film industry, comedy is viewed as an appropriate genre for commercial directors. However, peers and critics can be harsh judges of commercial directors specializing in comedy.

D'Astous et al. (2007) pointed out when consumers lack the information about products, country of origin also may be an efficient trait for making quality judgements. Therefore, it is assumed that filmgoers naturally associate film genres with specific countries. For example, the comedy is considered as traditional genre of Italian cinema, however the United States are famous for action movies, horror movies, thrillers and westerns.

Genre might become an overtly limiting a priori organizing tool that enables other forms of analytical insight to be developed, such as the connections between tastes

and social class, age, or gender. According to Beer (2013) genre might change and be mobile, however it is still the outcome of relatively rigid grids and boundaries. Nowadays, art studios have started to mix genres to broaden the potential appeal of a film and increase box office sales (Abrams et al., 2010). "Genre-mixing" might therefore be a conscious strategy (Lahire, 2008).

Pangarker and Smit (2013) included a range of predictor variables in their multivariate analysis of movie box office success, among which they included genre. Their results indicated that action genre is in positive correlation with revenue, on the other hand drama was negatively correlated. Their results are in line with results of Terry et al. (2005) as well as Prag and Casavant (1994). These results indicate that genre can act as a significant predictor of the movie's success.

The presented literature review indicates that genre of the film leads to specialization at all levels of not only production and post-production process, whereas communication with potential viewers (Abrams et al., 2010). Taking this into account it appears reasonable to add the construct referring to the genre in order fully understand the connection between genre and film marketing mix.

2.2. Changes in genre preference during COVID-19 period

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemics, the topic of genre preference and change of genre preference has attracted attention of experts in the field. For example, Clark (2020) analyzed the popularity of specific genres during the COVID-19 period and how and whether their popularity and interest changed. He acquired data from the digital film app Movies Anywhere and noticed a difference in user behavior in the period from March to May 2020. Total digital purchases were up 65% in the same period compared to last year, but the increase for specific genres was even more visible. The largest spikes were measured in the categories of family animation and sports, as well as horror and thrillers. Sports films saw a dramatic increase of 339% in sales during the pandemic, suggesting audiences were starving for that type of content (Clark, 2020).

Next, Filmpulse (2020) pointed out there are increasingly evident measures and differences in the number and genre of films people watch during COVID-19 pandemic. In countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Germany and France the interest and subscription rates on streaming services have risen by almost 50% to 90%. In these countries, the volume of video streaming has tripled or doubled. However, the most interesting part is connected to the fact that comedies have had a hard time in the charts in many countries. Only in Germany a comedy was in the top three ranks. This can be interpreted as that the Germans probably fought COVID-19 with humor rather than with thrillers and horror movies. On the other hand, the forefather of all films about pandemics, Contagion by director Steven Soderbergh, has made it into the top 3 streams in USA, France, United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain. Beside this film, during pandemics, people from France and Spain preferred thrillers, action and horror films more than earlier (Filmpulse, 2020).

Gorman (2020) wrote an article on how the streaming habits are changing during the pandemics. The results of his research showed that 41% of weekly Netflix users

during COVID-19 want to see more action, adventure, and/or fantasy content, and one third of them want to see more drama and documentary content. Seeing that weekly Netflix viewers are spending significant amounts of time on the platform — 41% watch it every single day and 63% watch it four or five days of a typical week – there is an opportunity to experiment with rolling multiple genres into a single offering. As he suggested, the next film to dominate the streaming platforms may just be a perfect blend of genres that caters to the widest array of viewers (Gorman, 2020).

An online survey was conducted by Statista (2021a) in the USA to discover which genre did the residents turn to since health expert guidance recommended staying away from public gatherings. Most of the respondents turned to comedies and action adventure. What was also an interesting result is that the genre preference varied across ethnic groups. The same company also explored are there differences in the genre preference during COVID-19 based on the age group (Statista, 2021b). The results showed that the younger viewers were more inclined to comedy, while the older viewers were more attracted by the science-fiction genre.

The results of the presented studies and analyses clearly indicate that the genre played a significant role in consumer behavior when it comes to film consumption during the COVID-19 pandemics.

3. Conceptual model and hypotheses development

Considering the importance of genre in the film industry, the authors wanted to form a conceptual model which would emphasize the impact of the genre preference on the importance of elements of film marketing mix during COVID-19. The conceptual model lies on the principles of the Genre theory by Chandler (1997) who states that "recognition of what is likely to be important (and what is not), derives from our knowledge of the genre." Therefore, the research question can be formulated as:

> H1: Does genre preference have a statistically significant impact on the importance of the elements of the film marketing mix during COVID-19 pandemic?

The proposed model is guided primarily by the model developed by Ulker-Demirel et al. (2018), the first model that managed to integrate the direct and indirect influences of film marketing mix elements. As a continuation of the previous studies on the relationship between films and marketing, the research of Ulker-Demirel et al. (2018) was one of the first conceptual models that examined the variables with an integrated framework. Unlike examining simple relationships among each variable in terms of audiences' purchase intentions, the aim of their study was to explain concrete relationships with an integrated concept. It aimed to examine the effect of the film marketing mix (based on the traditional marketing mix) elements on the purchase intentions of audiences and the indirect effects on their sharing behaviour with regard to these elements. In addition, it aimed to examine the direct effects of the frequency of attendance of audiences to cultural activities on their purchase intentions. The Ulker-Demirel model suggests adding the other effects and viriables to be considered by future studies based on the film marketing mix.

The model also relates on the model of Ulker-Demirel and Yildiz (2021) who observed how attitude towards the actor/actress and attitude towards the character

Table 1. Comparison of the proposed model and the previously devised models in the field.

Authors	Genre	Frequency of movie consumption on a channel of distribution	Movie budget	Origin	People	Promotion	Script
Ulker-Demirel et al. (2018)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ulker-Demirel and Yildiz (2021)	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Chang and Ki (2005)	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Brown et al. (2013)	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Peng et al. (2019)	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No

Source: The authors.

impact the attitude towards the movie, the product placement, and toward the brand. All of their hypothesized relationships were positive and statistically significant. Their model adds to the literature as it shows that actors and actresses not only influence the box office success but also shape the audience, implicitly meaning that attitude on film characteristics impacts the consumers' behaviour.

Chang and Ki (2005) in their complex model observed how brand-related variables (sequel, director, actor), objective features (production, budget, genre, MPAA rating), information sources (critics' rating), and distribution-related variables (Distributor's market power, Relese periods) impact the domestic box office performance. They observed the impact of seven genre and in the final equation they only retained the genre drama which had a negative impact. Their model adds to the literature as it shows that complex models can be made in the field, and that genre should be included in the model.

Brown et al. (2013) aimed to model the moviegoer's movie attendance using variables such as Metacritic rating, IMDB rating, Production budget, sequel, genre, MPAA ratings and similar. They explored a model for the period 2000–2005 and 2006–2009. Genre and budget were statistically significant in both models.

Peng et al. (2019) strived to model the box office revenue in China using people (main actor/actress, supporting actor/actress, director) and five different genres. Depending on the model different elements were statistically significant. Their work is mentioned in our literature review as they took into account the impact of people and genre in modelling.

This study aims to carefully expand the currently developed models by proposing new sub-elements of the marketing mix, as well as to explore the significance of the film genre on the remainder of the sub-elements and elements of the marketing mix. The proposed conceptual model has three parts: the impact of genre preference on the elements of product, on the placement, and on the promotion. Elements of our model are: genre, place of consumption, movie budget, origin, people behind and in the film, promotion, and script. Herein we present the comparison of the above-mentioned five models with the model we propose in this paper. As it can be seen from Table 1, our model strives to integrate elements covered by various previous research.

3.1. The impact of genre on the importance of product

Little research has been done on film genres in marketing, yet it is known that genre preference often guides the viewing behavior of cinemagoers. As an element of the marketing mix, Mohammadian and Habibi (2012) found that the film genre is the main priority for film viewers when it comes to the product. In most situations, film

viewers know in advance to which genre the film belongs and if they are going to watch it (Visch & Tan, 2008). Therefore, people have genre preferences which can be used for segmentation. This market segment identification method is logical, straightforward and has an effect on the film choice. Some film marketers have begun to segment audiences by their genre preferences to target trailers in cinemas by creating multiple trailers for multiple audiences (Hixson, 2006). Knowing that a film fits into a specific genre gives distributors and exhibitors important clues into how to promote it. Also knowing that a familiar genre can trigger expectations in audiences, marketing activities can play to these expectations.

The four traits of the product we focus on are people working on and in the film, script, whether the film is foreign or domestic, and the budget, and how the genre preference impacts their importance.

Desai and Basuroy (2005) in their study observed the interaction of genre familiarity and presence of a famous actor and showed that for films which belong to a genre the respondent is familiar with, the presence of a star has no impact on the film revenue. This indicates that the more the consumer is familiar with the genre, the less the presence of a star will be a crucial factor for his/her decision to consume a film. Such a result could have been expected, as only a small proportion of films within a genre have stars playing or directing them. Desai and Basuroy (2005) also state that for the fans of particular genre, the storyline plays an important role in deciding whether to watch a film or no. Gazley et al. (2011) found that the country of origin is an important film trait and that respondents prefer Hollywood films compared to domestic films. Budeva found that the importance of the information on the film budget differs among cultures, so we believe that the importance also differs among genre. Prior research suggests that the genre is an important factor consumers consider when deciding to get interested in a specific film which motivated the authors to add base their model on genre preference. Taking all of the above in consideration we hypothesize:

H1a: Genre preference has a statistically significant impact on the importance of the elements of the product (film) during COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2. The impact of genre preference on the placement

With the expansion of new technologies, consumers have the opportunity to watch the film repeatedly, which could increase their frequency of consumption (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). Hababou et al. (2016) found that film efficiency is negatively associated with the science fiction genre, and that there are no discernible differences in efficiency among other film genres. Bearing this in mind, we can assume that the preference for a different genre leads to different film frequency consumption. Gopinath pointed out in their research that movies of the thriller genre have the largest market coverage through different distribution channels, and movies of the drama genre have the smallest market coverage. Moreover, strongly collectivistic behavior has a positive relationship with consumers' attitudes towards watching specific genres through streaming platforms, and their intention to watch films online (Phau et al., 2014). Also, due to the current COVID-19 pandemics, the viewers are

massively turning to streaming services due to lockdown, which can increase viewer-ship of specific genres especially (Gorman, 2020) and lead to new models of film con-sumption such as co-watching where friends gather on a social network or platform and all watch together a film using share screen options (Basu, 2020). We believe that consumers who are fans of different genre prefer watching films in different settings. Our second hypothesis is:

> H1b: Genre preference has a statistically significant impact on the frequency of film consumption via streaming services during COVID-19 pandemic.

3.3. The impact of genre preference on promotion

Knowing that a film fits into a specific genre gives distributors and exhibitors import-ant clues into how to promote it. Kong (2007) states that a significant percent of the film budget is spent on promotion with the goal to attract potential viewers. Therefore, it is of high importance to promote a film adequately and maximize the reach of the targeted population.

As Schembri (1996) pointed out, in the 1980s, science fiction films selected for release in the American marketplace were subject to differential promotion, with greater financial resources being allocated to it. He continued to observe that as a marketing strategy, genre could be used to develop a unique brand image for each manufactured film so that it could be targeted at different segments of a mass market. It is also of interest to highlight the results of Gopinath who found out that films of different genre have different advertising media coverage when exploring the market in the US. Their results show that action films and thrillers have a higher coverage compared to dramas. Kong (2007) also embraced the extensive promotion and adver-tising in context of adding and highlighting the attractiveness of the specific genre. Silver (2007) states that Hollywood uses genres as a means by which the studios manufacture products that will have a specific appeal and interest to particular audi-ence segment and the same accounts for the promotion.

In the specific time of global pandemics, a film may be promoted through a com-bination of several different promotional channels and marketing innovation strat-egies if required (Wang et al., 2020). Therefore, it would be valuable for marketing experts to know which communication channel to turn to. We assume that there is a difference in the importance and attention consumers pay to promotional messages based on the genre they prefer. Our final hypothesis is:

> H1c: Genre preference has a statistically significant impact on the importance of film promotion during COVID-19 pandemic.

3.4. Proposed conceptual model

In this research, we strived to expand and modify some of the currently proposed conceptual models for assessing and quantifying the relationship between the above-explored elements in the context of COVID-19. The proposed conceptual model con-sists of a fandom of ten genres and three elements of the film marketing mix. In the
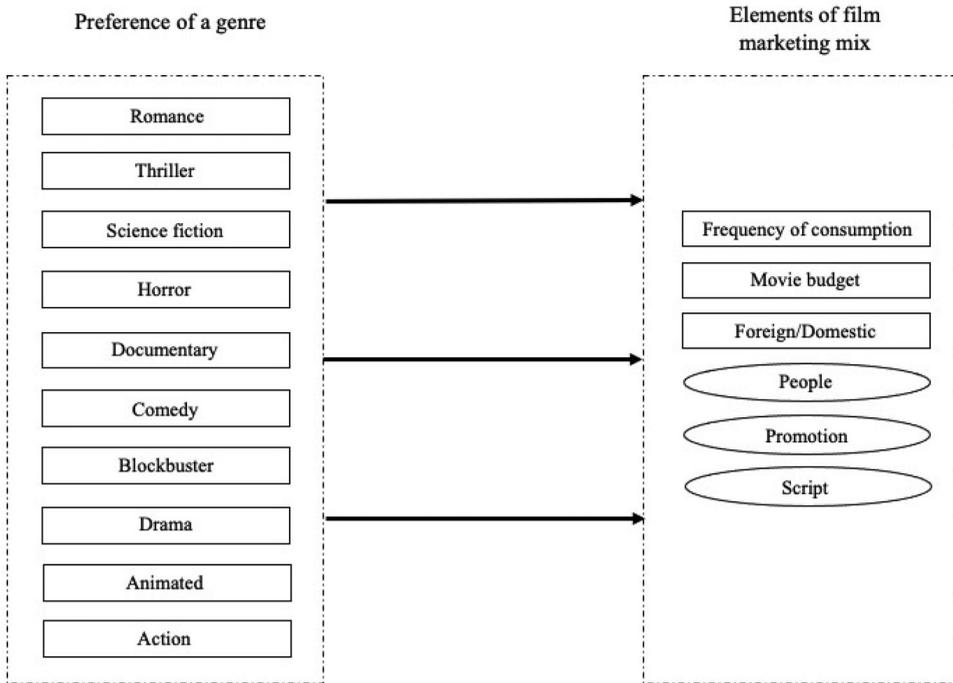
Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model of genre preference impact on integrated marketing elements in film industry.
Source: The authors.

model we used measured variables and three constructs: people, script, and promotion. Construct people is measured through the importance of the presence famous actors, director, producer, and Serbian actors. The following construct is quantified through the importance of the traits of the script: is it based on a novel, is it based on a true story, is the film nominated or has received a prize such as Oscar or Golden Lion. The final construct is measured through the importance of promotional messages on different communication channels: TV, social networks, billboards, and print. The proposed model is presented in Figure 1.

It is expected that the proposed model will shed light of the specificities of product, placement, and promotion preferences of fans of different genre which might act as a road map to creating film marketing strategies tailored by the film genre.

4. Research methodology

4.1. Procedure, participants, and the survey

To accept or reject the defined research hypothesis, a survey was conducted online from 1st April until 10th April 2020, when the lockdown was imposed in Serbia due to COVID-19 pandemics. The sampling method that we applied was Convenience Sampling which is a nonprobability sampling method. The authors distributed the survey on Facebook groups that related to film lovers in Serbia and have the most followers compared to other similar Facebook groups. One of the Facebook groups

authors choosed is closed group named "Proponent of good films – only for film lovers" (on Serbian – P. D. F.) with 95,900 followers. Moreover, the survey was distributed on personal profiles of film lovers group members. This sampling method was used to reach as much film fans, cinema goers and those interested in the film industry. Nevertheless, we are aware that this sampling method might be biased and that it has drawbacks (Etikan et al., 2016). Participation was voluntary and anonymous. After the survey was closed, statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 25, while the SEM analysis was done in AMOS 22.

The survey was divided into three parts. The first part was related to basic demographic information. These included questions regarding gender, educational attainment, and residence. All questions were measured on a nominal scale. The second part to habits regarding film consumption. Some questions in this segment were measured on Likert scale ("I see myself as a film fan"), while some were open questions ("How many movies a week do you watch?"). The final part comprised of questions concerning the importance of the specific elements of film marketing mix. All of the questions in the third section were measured on the five-point Likert scale. The elements of the film marketing mix that we focused on have been previously studied in the studies of Gazley et al. (2011), Dogruel (2018), Ulker-Demirel et al. (2018), and Lee et al. (2017). Questions used to quantify the importance of different elements of film marketing mix are given in Appendix A.

Regarding the research design, our study was a one-time cross-sectional study. This type of study is not expensive to conduct, but the change in the opinions and attitudes of the respondents cannot be followed through time. Nevertheless, we opted for a cross-sectional study as we wanted to capture the specific behaviours during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our study is also confirmatory as we strive to confirm or dispute the proposed conceptual model. The study can be classified as non-experimental as there was no manipulation of experience of the participants.

4.2. Data analysis

To verify the proposed conceptual model and to test the research hypotheses, structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis was employed. SEM analysis is a statistical multivariate analysis which lies on the principles of factor analysis and linear regression. Thus, it allows for construction of latent variables of constructs which cannot be encompassed with a sole variable and the mutual relationship between them. Therefore, its usage quickly became widespread in different fields of study. We identified several examples of the application of SEM analysis in the field of marketing in the creative industries. The first research that attracted our attention is by Tamborini and Stiff (1987). Namely, the authors conducted SEM analysis to find predictors of horror film attendance and appeal. Mishra et al. (2016) went a step further and wanted to understand how arousal, pleasure, and demographic background impact satisfaction with the film. Ulker-Demirel et al. (2018) proposed a model which tackles some of the constructs in the model we herein propose. Research points out that the development of conceptual models in the film industry is a prominent field of study and that SEM analysis is widely employed to do so.

5. Research results

5.1. Sample characteristics

In total 1606 respondents participated in our research, 456 (28.4%) males and 1150 (71.6%) females. Although there is a disproportion in the respondents' gender, this was to be expected, bearing in mind that females are more prone to participating in online surveys (Smith, 2008). The mean age of the respondents was 28.61, with a standard deviation of 7.242. When it comes to the highest completed educational attainment, most of the respondents completed bachelor studies or the equivalent (40.2%), followed by those who finished master studies (29.4%), and those with a secondary school diploma (27.9%). Regarding the level of income, most of the respondents indicated that they have a monthly income between 50,000 and 80,000 RSD (22.7%), which is around 500€ to 650€, followed by those with an income over 80,000 RSD (20.5%), which is over 650€. Most of the respondents are residents of Belgrade (47.6%), while the remainder are from other cities in Serbia, such as Novi Sad (10.3%), Niš (4.2%), and others. It can be concluded that we covered a segment of the population which is educated, has an above-average income which is around 500€ to 650€, and resides in Belgrade.

Besides these demographic questions, we aimed to capture the respondents' habits and attitudes to watching films. The respondents on average watch 2.815 films per week with a standard deviation of 1.660, and the median number of films watched per week is 3.000. Such a result indicates that we have covered respondents who consume films on a regular basis. They most commonly watch films alone (50.8%) or with a partner (32.2%). Almost half of the respondents prefer to watch foreign films (49.7%), only 3.7% prefer Serbian films, while the remainder enjoy both equally. When it comes to the type of cinema where the respondents prefer to go and see a film, most of them (42.3%) would choose a small cinema in the neighborhood, followed by those who prefer cinema chains (34.7%), and the remainder enjoy film festivals and projections in cultural centers. Finally, most of the respondents describe themselves as film fans (46.0%), followed by those who are not so serious fans (24.8%), and those who are extreme film fans (24.1%). Based on the above, we can conclude that we have covered a sample of respondents who frequently enjoy films and declare themselves as film fans.

5.2. Verification of the proposed conceptual model

The first step in the SEM analysis is the observation of the internal consistency of latent constructs. The most commonly cited and used metrics is Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) which takes values from 0 to 1, whereas the closer the metrics is to 1, the better the chosen variables measure a specific concept. The obtained Cronbach's alpha per proposed construct are as follows: *Promotion* 0.733, *Script* 0.700, and *People* 0.616. The Cronbach's alpha of the construct *People* is marginally below the threshold of 0.7 (Peterson, 1994). Therefore, we continued with the analysis.

The initial model had a low fit to the data (Chi-square = 3319.615, df = 265, $p < 0.000$, RMSEA = 0.080, CFI = 0.610, NFI = 0.662, SRMR = 0.070). Therefore, we used modification indices to fine-tune and enhance our model. We removed the paths with the Critical Ratio below the threshold 1.96. Also, paths with a standardized coefficient below 0.5 in absolute values were left in the model, since the aim was to detect all possible predictors and obtain a solid measurement model (Milenković et al., 2019).

The final model shows a relatively good fit to the data. (Chi-square = 1099.684, df = 232, $p < 0.000$, RMSEA = 0.048, CFI = 0.887, NFI = 0.863, TLI = 0.854, SRMR = 0.050). All the observed indices are above or marginally below the threshold. If the sample size, model complexity, and the acceptable and marginally acceptable values of the fit indices are taken into account, it can be concluded that the final model has a solid fit to the data (Hooper et al., 2008).

The obtained coefficients within the defined constructs were all statistically significant and positive, so there was no need to change the construct structures. The final model is presented in Table 1.

The first element of the marketing mix for which we found predictors is related to the place of distribution of film consumption, the online streaming services. Four genres have a statistically significant impact: science fiction, thriller, documentary, and blockbuster. All coefficients are positive, indicating that the more the respondent is a fan of these genres, the more they watch films via streaming services. The obtained results are in line with the research done by Gorman (2020) who indicated that the specific genres are seeing increased ratings on streaming platforms.

The film budget proved to have the least predictors, just one, the fandom of blockbuster films. The obtained coefficient is positive indicating that the more the respondent is a fan of blockbuster films, the more he or she cares about the films' budget and believes it to be an important feature of the film. Only 3.0% of variability of the importance of budget could be explained.

Interestingly, the origin of the film has five genre predictors: thriller, science fiction, documentary, blockbuster, and animated. The obtained coefficients for the effect of thrillers, science fiction and blockbusters are negative, indicating that fans of these genres prefer foreign films. On the other hand, the coefficients for documentaries and animated films are positive, indicating that for fans of these genres the origin of the film is of little or no consequence. Again, a low percentage of variability was explained, 2.8%.

The people behind and in the film are an important factor for fans of science fiction, blockbusters, romance, and dramas. As expected, people are also an important factor in blockbusters, science fiction films, and dramas. On the other hand, the results indicate that for fans of romance, the same does apply. Namely, the more the person is a fan of romantic films, the less he or she cares about the people who worked on the film. The fandom of these four genres explains 4.1% of the importance of people behind the film.

Promotion of the film proved to be important for the fans of five genres: science fiction, comedy, blockbusters, romance, and action. If the film is a comedy, blockbuster, romance, or action, it should be more heavily promoted on social networks,

Table 2. Presentation of the final conceptual model: construct, predictors, and obtained standardized coefficients.

Construct	Predictors	Std coeff
How often do you watch movies via streaming services?	Science Fiction	0.056*
	Thriller	0.081**
	Documentary	0.062*
	Blockbuster	0.063*
Film budget	Blockbuster	0.174**
Origin	Thriller	−0.066**
	Science Fiction	−0.097**
	Documentary	0.066**
	Blockbuster	−0.070**
	Animated	0.061**
People	Science Fiction	0.096**
	Blockbuster	0.103**
	Romance	−0.101**
	Drama	0.085**
Promotion	Science Fiction	−0.089**
	Comedy	0.102**
	Blockbuster	0.131**
	Romance	0.109**
	Action	0.129**
Script	Thriller	0.069**
	Horror	−0.062**
	Documentary	0.089**
	Blockbuster	0.123**

Note: $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$.
Source: The authors.

billboards, TV, and in the press. Unexpectedly, fans of science fiction, take promotion into account, but the effect is negative, indicating that the more they are fans of this genre, the less they pay attention to promotion. The R square of the model is 7.8%

When it comes to the script, fans of thrillers, horror films, documentaries, and blockbusters find it to be an important film characteristics. The more the respondent is a fan of thrillers, documentaries, and blockbusters, the more he or she takes this film characteristic into account when deciding whether to watch a film. Interestingly, for fans of horror films this is not a major factor for watching a film. In this model, 3.6% of variability can be explained.

As presented, the obtained R squares are low. The model with the highest R square is promotion, whose 8.0% of variability can be explained by the five predictors, followed by People, with R square of 4.1%. Nevertheless, previous research on conceptual models in the film industry also obtained a low percentage of variability explained (Ulker-Demirel et al., 2018; Palomba, 2020). (Table 2)

6. Discussion and conclusion

6.1. Discussion

In this research, we propose a novel conceptual model which strives to unveil how the preference for a genre impacts the importance of the elements of film marketing mix. Our model attempts to incorporate elements and constructs from previously devised models, but at the same time, tries to implement novel elements which have

not been previously observed in an integrated conceptual model. Having that our model is based on genre theory, our model has solid foundation. The main findings of our research can be outlined as:

The first hypothesis is confirmed, as the model shows that depending on the genre, different elements of the film as a product are perceived as important. The obtained results are in line with the results of Chausson (2010) who showed that personality factors contribute substantially in understanding people's film preferences and that preferences may vary in accordance with personality characteristics and genre preference. The element of the marketing mix with the least predictors is budget, which is only important to blockbuster film fans. On the other hand, origin and promotion have the most predictors, five each. Confirmation of hypothesis one indicates that depending on the genre of the film, the marketers should communicate different elements of the film as a product.

Hypotheses two has also been confirmed, as four genres, blockbusters, documentary, thriller, and science fiction proved to have a statistically significant impact on the frequency of film consumption via online streaming services. Similar results have been obtained by Mohammadian and Habibi (2012) who showed that genre is a statistically significant for attracting audiences to consume a movie.

The final hypothesis was also approved, as five genres have an impact on the importance of promotion, indicating that fans of specific genres pay more attention to promotional messages on different channels. This results goes hand in hand with the research of Park and Berger (2010) who suggest that genre may have and impact of the effectiveness of different promotional activities.

6.2. Concluding remarks

Marketing activities in the film industry can be divided to generalized and specialized. Marketing activities which are generalized target a larger proportion of the population, however, they might generate less appeal (Hsu, 2006). Namely, some audiences might have difficulties interpreting it or might be discontent for receiving a generalized message and might disapprove the film due to it (Frank & Cook, 1996). Zuckerman and Kim (2003) provide evidence on the economic and social penalties audience can put on a film if their expectations are not met. On the other side, the specialized messages are tailored to target a specific segment of the audience. Therefore, it is on the marketing experts to choose which approach to take. If the specialized approach is taken, the long-recognized function of genre as a communication device between artists and audiences should be taken into account (Keuschnigg & Wimmer, 2017) as the genre of the film might indicate which audience the film is likely to attract. This might be of extreme use during COVID-19 era.

Based on the obtained SEM results it can be concluded that a conceptual model based on the preference of different genres and the importance of elements of film marketing mix can be made, that there are multiple statistically significant relations between the observed elements, that the model confirms the role of genre in the complex process of choosing a film in the observed case study setting.

The results obtained in this study could improve the film industry's specificities when it comes to the connection between genre and elements of film marketing mix in the context of COVID-19. By understanding their different effects on film purchase intention, it should provide marketers with the means to manage marketing activities in the film industry with more ease and efficiency in the changed environment.

We hope that the proposed conceptual model on the impact of genre preference on the consumption of products in the film industry can initiate further research on the topic and on future improvements of conceptual models in the creative industries.

6.3. Theoretical, practical and societal implications of the proposed conceptual model

According to Johnson (1998) and Desai and Basuroy (2005) the higher the familiarity and preference of a genre, the reliance of other factors on the decision to watch a movie will be dramatically reduced. Our findings illustrate that fandom of different genres has an impact on the importance of elements of the film marketing mix. Namely, marketing activities and the optimal marketing mix can be determined in relation to the specific target market, segmented through the degree of preference for a particular film genre. Furthermore, direct cause-and-effect relations between the preferred genre contents and consumer habits have been identified, as well as their preferences in relation to individual marketing mix instruments and their communication instruments. We can conclude that with our analysis, we have identified the elements of marketing mix on which the fans of particular film genre pay attention to. This is in line with the work of Palomba (2020) who explored the impact of genre preference on usage of different streaming services.

Namely, according to Sheth (2020) "it is inevitable that some habits will die because the consumer under the lockdown condition has discovered an alternative that is more convenient, affordable, and accessible." The film industry, especially the cinema segment, is hit by streaming services and the shift in consumers' behavior (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). Therefore, marketing experts will have to adapt their policies and strategies accordingly (He & Harris, 2020). It will be of high importance to differentiate and devise appropriate marketing activities for specific audiences (Leverin & Liljander, 2006). When deciding on the marketing mix for the target markets of specific film genres, the presented model suggests differentiated marketing activities.

Another practical implication of the obtained results could be drawn. The frequency of genres as predictors of the importance of elements of the marketing mix is presented in Figure 2. For example, the research results indicate that fandom of blockbusters has an impact on all observed elements of film marketing mix: film budget, film origin, people in the film, promotion, script, and distribution of films on streaming services. Therefore, by focusing marketing activities on the identified elements, the blockbuster audience could be attracted. The same approach can be taken to interpret the latter frequencies.
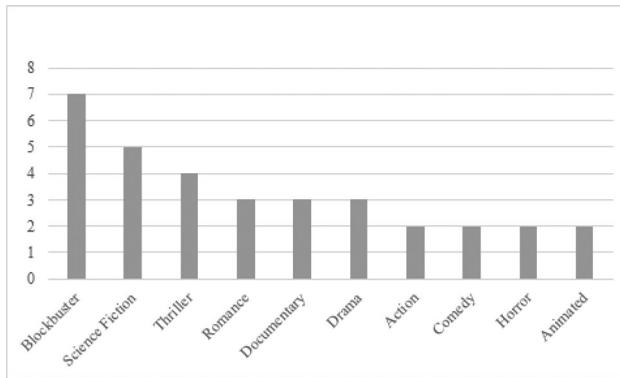
Figure 2. Frequency of genres as predictors.
Source: The authors.

An important managerial implication is also that the genre of the film is not enough to predict the importance of certain aspects of the film to a potential viewer and frequency of consumption. Gunter (2018) states that genre of the movie and genre preference can play an important part in the decision, but it does not operate on its own. The obtained results could be interpreted that to a sole fan a genre is not the only factor which determines the person's decision to watch a film or take into account information about a film.

Also, minor societal implications of our study can be made. It can be concluded that genre preference does have an impact on consumers' behaviour, although slight. The proposed model might help consumers more easily focus on elements of film based on the genre that they prefer and provide them with an adequate approach to the film market. Namely, it might make society more satisfied with the fact that it will be easier to find the films they like or have the preference for. This would help the part of the society, especially the those who often enjoy films, to be less dissatisfied with the choice of films and to with more ease find films that meet their criteria.

7. Limitation and future directions of the study

Although our study provided useful and practical results, we also identified several future directions of the study. One possible direction of future studies could be related to the segmentation of respondents using clustering and bi-clustering methods. In that way, similar groups of respondents could be identified and specific marketing activities could be defined for each of them (Frémal & Lecron, 2017).

The model we proposed is complex, but as the results show, there is a variable with just one predictor. Therefore, the model could be modified by excluding some elements and including novel ones, such as IMDB scores, Rotten tomatoes scores, film critiques, and film posters.

As mentioned prior, the conducted study is a cross-sectional study. However, it might be of interest to reconduct the survey after the pandemics to explore how did the consumer behavior changed. Although that would not be a longitudinal study, it might indicate changes in the consumer behaviour.

A particular limitation of the study is the fact that the survey was conducted only in Serbia. This issue could be tackled by conducting the same research in neighbouring countries such as Croatia and Montenegro. Besides observing a larger sample and being able to create a more complex model, we could also inspect the differences in the importance of elements of the marketing mix between countries. Multi-group SEM analysis could be performed to inspect where there are statistically significant differences between the models between countries.

Another possible limitation of the study is the fact that we used convenience sampling which might have led to a biased sample. Especially on the part that we captured those with high income and those who are members of Facebook groups related to film. If the study is to be repeated, we would take another approach to sampling. For example, not only film fans would be surveyed, as the nature of the results is directly dependent on those circumstances. Our results based on convenience sampling are reliable, but cannot be generalized, which is also a potential drawback of the study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix A: Parts of the conducted survey related to the importance of elements of film marketing mix

The following questions were measured on a five-point Likert scale:

Genre
Indicate on a five-point Likert scale your preference of each of the following genre: Romance, Thriller, Science fiction, Horror, Documentary, Comedy, Blockbuster, Drama, Animated, and Action
People
Hiring famous actors/actresses in a film influences my decision on whether to watch that film
The fact that there is a recognized director behind the film influences my decision on whether to watch that film
The fact that there is a recognized producer behind the film influences my decision on whether to watch that film
The appearance of Serbian actors in a foreign film influences my decision on whether to watch that film
Script
If the film is a screen adaptation of a novel/book, it will influence my decision to watch that film
If the film is based on true events, it will affect my decision to watch that film
If a film is nominated for a prestigious film award (eg an Oscar) it will influence my decision to watch the film
If a film has won prestigious film awards (e.g., an Oscar) it will influence my decision to watch that film
Promotion
The promotion of the film on television influences my decision to watch that film
The promotion of the film through social networks influences my decision to watch that film
The promotion of the film on billboards influences my decision to watch that film
The promotion of the film through print media influences my decision to watch that film

Place of distribution
How often do you watch movies via streaming services?
   1—Never, 2—Several times a year, 3—Not sure, 4—Once a month, 5—Several times a month
Foreign/Domestic
I would rather watch a film if it is:
   1—foreign, 2—domestic (Serbian), 3—I prefer films from both origins equally

Source: The authors.