Combining Aesthetic and Psychological Approaches to TV Series Addiction

"This book deals with addiction to TV series from various disciplinary perspectives and from cross-cultural and innovative angles. Its originality is twofold. First, the authors manage to consider "addicted" individuals on the one hand and TV series on the other as distinct objects for study. Second, they succeed in combining a theoretical method with an empirical one. The result is a thought-provoking yet readable book (for readers of both French and English) that provides an up-to-date report on an emerging social trend."
—Joël Billieux, Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Luxembourg

"This multidisciplinary volume overturns conventional analyses of TV shows by engaging with the interrelation between series and dependence. Ground-breaking essays written by psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, sociologists, screenwriters and film scholars examine the effects of overconsumption, as well as the commercial, narrative and reflexive strategies leading to (over)fidelity, making this book a vital contribution to multiple fields of research."
—Sarah Hatchuel, Professor of English Literature and Director of the GRIC Research Centre, University of Le Havre

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Edited by

Nathalie Camart,
Sébastien Lefait,
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**Part IV. Implementing Acceptance or Defense Mechanisms Across the
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Introduction

The "Potato Chips" Effect: TV Series' Addictive Additives

Nathalie Camart, Sebastien Lefait, Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris, Lucia Romo

> "*It's like the people who make potato chips. They know how to put the right chemicals in there to make you want to eat the next potato chip. Our goal is to make you want to watch that next episode.*"
> —*Carlton Cuse*

What if it were not Carlton Cuse, who wrote several episodes for the renowned series *Lost*, but a chemical engineer for the tobacco industry who made a similar confession? It's a mind-boggling thought! Such a statement would amount to acknowledging that not only is tobacco addictive, but that it is also designed to be as habit-forming as possible in order to generate huge profits. By comparison, Carlton Cuse's revelation does not sound in the least shocking. Nevertheless, it establishes two facts concerning TV series. First, it proves that they are undeniably addictive. Because they rank among consumer goods, they can trigger cravings. Besides, like the food products mentioned in Cuse's simile, they come with serious side effects in case of overdose. Second, Cuse's words carry the implicit admission that TV series are *intended* to cause dependence. Their creators fine-tune a winning formula involving the ingredients and know-how that are most likely to generate and maintain their show's addictive dimension. Does it mean that TV series are the only legal drug society still unrestrictively allows?

This book purports to establish then analyze the interrelation between series and dependence by focusing on two aspects of their connection: TV series overconsumption, and the production devices that lead to it. Due to this two-sided goal, the volume brings together specialists from different backgrounds. On the one hand, it involves people working with addiction

(psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, etc.), whose observation skills and analytical tools are extremely useful to detect TV series addiction, and make sense of its mechanics to predict its consequences. For similar reasons, the authors are also professionals working with children and teenagers (teachers, school doctors and nurses, social mobilizers and educators, parents, etc.), since youths under 18 are largely affected by addictive tendencies (Tisseron, 2000). On the other hand, the contributors to this volume include TV series specialists, producers or scriptwriters, as well as academics in the fields of film and TV series studies, cultural studies, or narratology (among others). Their specific perspectives on the topic help better understand what it is about the construction or reception of TV series that aims to create, maintain, amplify, or on the contrary curb their ingrained addictive effects. Due to this transdisciplinary and collaborative approach, the book draws new results from the combination of its two complementary perspectives, and answers, at least tentatively, many of the questions asked in the next paragraphs of this introduction. For the sake of suspense and to preserve the volume's addictiveness (hopefully), the results have been left for readers to find by themselves inside the chapters.

The volume's first point of interest is related to social insertion and to the psychological, physiological, and behavioral autonomy of individuals. Indeed, several articles gathered in the volume attempt to justify the existence of dependence to TV series (Wellenstein, 2008), and fit it within the category of drug-free dependence (Valleur and Velea, 2002; Couteron 2008; Holden, 2001) while also taking into account its potentially positive aspects on the psychological construction of individuals (Johnson, 2009; Niemiec and Wedding, 2014). Are we dealing with abnormal use, dependence or addiction, the authors ask? What is the place of TV series overconsumption in the field of psychiatry, according to current classifications? Are there any individual factors that make individuals psychologically vulnerable to overconsumption? What is its relation to other behavioral patterns that are considered problematic (workaholism for instance...)? Beyond those risks, to what extent can human beings derive psychological or emotional benefits from TV series overconsumption? Is it possible for TV series to promote better understanding of social relations and connections, or even to help improve them?

Answering this question comes with quantification problems. Is it possible to evaluate the daily consumption of a group of subjects? What is the impact of binge watching and what motivates it? What do binge watchers derive from the practice? Does competition with other fans play

a part in the addictive process? Is watching the show before the others an important incentive to binge watch? To measure the impact of TV series on viewers, they have been asked to testify to their experiences through questionnaires. The collected answers have led the contributors to deepen their knowledge of viewing practices and their effects, from a psychological as well as from a sociological perspective. Several chapters consequently assess the psychological impact of such a recent phenomenon as binge watching / media marathoning, or delve into the reasons why merging into a virtual community of fictional characters may be experienced as pleasurable and profitable. What is the usual sociodemographic profile of TV series addicts, if any? Does it change according to the types of series they prefer? Does it differ with age? With gender?

This part of the volume fits into wider research undertaken by social workers, sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists, concerning the causes, consequences and stakes of our relationship with surrounding screens. It investigates possible similarities with other types of addiction: video games, TV in general, the Internet, social networks, etc. (Valleur and Matysiak, 2003). The book seeks to characterize TV series dependence and locate it within behavioural addiction studies: does it mean one is addicted to a product, or to a pattern of behavior related to this product? Are there any physical symptoms of TV series dependence (going cold turkey to block oneself off from some addictive practise, sleeplessness, etc.)? What are the consequences of series addiction? Are they short-term, midterm or long-term? What is their impact on people's behaviors, on the personal and on the social level?

Some contributors also interrogate the potential solutions to the issue, based on the many signs indicating it is, at least for a few individuals, harmful to watch TV shows for too long and too often. What are society's ways of dealing with this new type of addictive behavior? Are preventive measures being taken, and if such is the case, how do they work? How do departments of public health connect TV series dependence with established forms of addiction?

The volume also reflects on how communities may be formed around a physical object that opens onto virtual worlds. On the side of psychology, then, the topic of the book fits into the wider research field of metacognition studies, as it addresses the following issues to better understand cognition through fiction and specific media consumption (Young, 2012; Shinamura, 2013; Zachs, 2014). Does it make sense to draw conclusions from extant research in *neurocinematics* (Hasson et al. 2008)? Does brain imagery reveal TV series dependence, the same as recent studies have shown that using touch-sensitive screens alters our brain's representation of our

fingers? Is there an impact on neurotransmitters? Is there an impact on the reward circuit, or at least on the production of dopamine? What part does TV series' high demand on memory play in the addiction process (through the repetition of narrative landmarks, locations, characters, types of interaction)? What part does the soundtrack play in the spectators' identification of characters and places, and to act as a catalyst of specific diegetic moments that recur as leitmotivs?

Tentatively, the chapters thus suggest that the dawn of a new age, which we may call post-screen and post-series, is coming. Contributors enquire into how spectators speak about their addictive tendencies. Do they see them as a source of pain or pleasure? What do they do to get "clean" or, on the contrary, to feed their addiction? What part of their lives is devoted to it? How much time do they spend organizing their series consumption on a daily basis? Do they consider substitutes as a way of weaning themselves (other TV programs for instance)? Are there any cases of denial? Is TV series addiction taboo, a fault to be concealed, or on the contrary a source of satisfaction to be bragged about in broad daylight? Is there such a thing as "serial memory", i.e. the serial equivalent of filmic memory? Do the people who consider themselves hooked on series have specific sets of beliefs? Do they behave in similar ways? Do they fall into specific subgroups? One clue to answering these questions lies in the observation that individuals gradually reintroduce the time factor into life-management, after realizing, under the pressure of new psychological and social constraints, how much time they have spent living in a fantasy world.

The second perspective deals with the creative processes that are designed to make series addictive (Ang, 1985). In a number of chapters, TV series are studied from within in order for the authors to evaluate how they can promote or prevent the addiction process. In what ways do TV series foster dependence? This leads authors to investigate commercial strategies (advertising, teasers, transmedia broadcasting, "previously on" reminders, marketing, derivatives, spin-offs …), and narrative strategies (duration of the narrative, cliffhangers, inclusion of news events, constructing a sense of belonging to a community, resurrecting / evicting characters due to fans' demand, Internet broadcast of alternative endings, taking into account the views expressed on forums, etc.).

Additionally, some of the authors investigate the network of ideological and commercial stakes that push producers, scriptwriters, showrunners, and media moguls to craft programs that TV consumers soon cannot do without. TV series producers and creators seek to redeem

themselves of creating addicts by acknowledging the addictive dimension of their programs within the shows themselves (Darras, 2003). How do series represent the issues of the addictive tendencies they generate, as well as dependence in general (junkie or addict characters, sequences involving support groups, mirroring the inevitable separation that occurs after the final episode, mirroring relapses, withdrawal syndromes, weaning, addiction to a fictional universe, creative processes, the series' reception, etc.)?

Many articles featured within this volume analyze how the creators of series seek to generate an aesthetic balance between narrative strategies and commercial techniques to create a unique relationship between the viewing subject and its object, as the former feels the need to be faithful to the latter. This is achieved, for instance, through the study of character identification and connected issues. Subjectively, what is the point of identifying with a character: escapism, seeking courage to face daily life or to create a new life for oneself, self-criticism through a doppelgänger, whether it be a guardian angel or a demon? In this respect, do TV series have a different impact than movies?

The contributions also include an analysis of TV series dependence within the global context of convergence culture and transmediality (Jenkins, 1992), but also with regards to commercial techniques such as the creation of brand communities. The community aspects of TV series dependence, which has been the object of much attention by TV channels as they have for years now started testing series pilots before broadcasting their shows, receives special attention. Importantly, linking viewers to the shows by creating a community around the products bridges the gap between the aesthetic and the sociological aspects of TV series. The complementary trend known as *hate-watching*, in which viewers gather to share their hatred for specific TV content, is mentioned in the introduction to the volume.

The place of TV series dependence can thus be studied within the new liberal economy, with regards to Jameson's version of post-modernism. This leads some contributors of the volume to locate the problem of TV series dependence within the larger prospect of universal and timeless debates on the divide between high and low culture, or on the alleged dangers of the virtual. The question of value is addressed: some TV series or channels fight addiction, thereby expressing their awareness that it comes with adverse consequences. But to what extent can we consider that some of the specific features of TV series are natural blockers of addictive processes (division into seasons, episode length and frequency of broadcast, alienation effects preventing identification, spoilers, etc.)?

Along the chapters, addiction to TV series is thus given a place in cultural history and media history. The contributors collectively evince how it relates to the traditional criticism against fiction, according to which it distracts human beings from reality. Consequently, it seems possible to make up a genealogy of addiction to serial narratives, from the oral or literary origins up to film serials, pre-"New Golden Age" TV series, and the latest serial formats. What will come next to prove once again that serialization is part of human psyche, therefore addictive, lies beyond the cliffhanger of our time, in which the next bout of media consumption is avidly awaited, and sometimes *immediate*. As for the answers to the questions above, they can be accessed immediately, in the series of chapters starting on the next page.

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PREAMBULE / FOREWORD

DES CAS EXISTENT, MAIS SI L'ADDICTION AUX SERIES N'EXISTAIT PAS ?

ELISABETH ROSSE

Lorsque Lucia Romo m'a proposé de participer à un colloque à propos de la dépendance aux séries TV, je lui ai dit que l'addiction aux séries – la dépendance pathologique entraînant de véritables conséquences sur la vie d'un individu − n'existait pas. J'appuyais alors mon point de vue sur mon expérience clinique. En poste à l'Hôpital Marmottan, centre connu comme lieu de soins des addictions aux écrans, je n'avais jamais reçu de personne en souffrance à cause des séries. Il est vrai que certains patients, fumeurs de marijuana parlaient parfois de leur propension à rester scotché derrière un écran à visionner des séries sans y porter plus d'intérêt. Ces quelques témoignages laissaient à penser qu'il s'agissait plus d'une conduite de remplissage qui pouvait prendre une forme de dépendance anesthésique quand elle se surajoutait à une consommation de psychotropes. Or, fin 2016, se présentait une jeune femme de 18 ans, venue consulter et problématiser sa situation autour de ce motif : la dépendance aux séries…

Quelques mots de cette situation :

Eve a 18 ans et est originaire de province. Elle habite à Paris depuis plus de 3 mois pour poursuivre ses études de médecine dans la « meilleure université ». Elle regardait déjà des séries télévisées quand elle vivait avec sa mère mais depuis son arrivée à Paris, sa consommation s'est intensifiée et elle fait obstacle à sa détermination profonde de devenir médecin. Par la suite, elle expose sa situation familiale : depuis la séparation douloureuse de ses parents quand elle avait 11 ans, sa sœur cadette vit avec celle qu'elle appelle son géniteur, à Paris. Eve quant à elle, n'a pas vu son père depuis un an. Au moment de la séparation de ses parents, elle raconte « avoir pris parti » pour sa mère, mais précise aussitôt que ses deux parents sont « insupportables ». Elle est habitée par une profonde colère. Pour supporter ces conditions d'existence, sa mère sombre dans une dépression et Eve se fabrique une carapace visant à tenir à distance toute émotion, en

particulier des pratiques de scarification qu'elle ne cherche pas à cacher : «
Cela ne regarde que moi, mon corps » explique-t-elle quand on l'interroge
sur ces marques : « Alors pourquoi les autres s'en occupent ? ». Ce
premier contact avec un « psy », a été imposé et donc mal vécu. Eve
trouve alors refuge chez sa grand-mère paternelle dont elle se sent très
proche encore aujourd'hui.

Au second entretien, son temps de visionnage a diminué, elle est plus
apaisée et toujours d'une exigence démesurée envers elle-même et son
entourage et particulièrement ses pairs d'âge qu'elle ne fréquente plus : un
vécu de trahison avec l'une de ses amies a fini de la convaincre de ne plus
fréquenter quiconque. Les personnes qui reçoivent des joueurs de jeux
vidéo excessifs reconnaitront dans cette description des éléments
caractéristiques. Mais il existe aussi des différences : la position du joueur
est plus interactive et les mondes numériques offrent une immersion
inédite. En comparaison, le téléspectateur semble plus passif. Sans doute
ne s'est-on pas suffisamment interrogé sur l'impact de la télévision. Il
s'agit là du « *prevention paradox* » de Geoffrey Rose, illustré par son
exemple : si tout le monde fumait 40 cigarettes par jour, le cancer du
poumon ne serait plus perçu que comme une maladie génétique (Rose,
1981). Ce « paradoxe de la prévention » rend compte de la difficulté à
associer deux approches dans la recherche des causes d'une maladie :
l'une par les « cas à risques » mettant à jour des étiologies des facteurs
individuels de vulnérabilité génétique, psychologique, ou autres ; l'autre
populationnelle, qui repose sur la mise en évidence de facteurs très
généraux, de facteurs d'environnement indépendants du malade concerné.
Avec une moyenne de plus de trois heures par jour devant la télé et ce
depuis des décennies, il est impossible de mesurer l'impact du flux
d'images sur notre cerveau.

Ainsi, considérer les usages excessifs d'écrans comme des addictions
est non seulement hâtif mais réduit un champ encore insuffisamment
exploré à une problématique éminemment déterminée par des facteurs
individuels.

Les analogies entre usages abusifs de jeux vidéo et dépendance aux
séries sont nombreuses (usage du même dispositif, centration du
comportement, âge des personnes concernées…). Or les ressemblances
superficielles ne suffisent pas à constituer une homologie.

Il faut se remémorer la notion de niche écologique développée par le
philosophe Ian Hacking qui a travaillé sur les conditions d'émergence puis
de disparition de la vogue récente de personnalités multiples aux Etats-
Unis ainsi que sur la dromomanie, cette folie du déplacement qui sévit en
France à la fin du XIXème siècle, entité nosographique disparue depuis

(Hacking, 2006). Hacking considère que la naissance de telles maladies relève de la conjonction de 4 vecteurs : l'observabilité, l'évasion, la polarité culturelle et la taxinomie médicale. Gardons-nous donc de taxer de pathologie des comportements émergents qui sont à réinscrire dans un mouvement plus large, une révolution majeure dont il est difficile d'imaginer toutes les conséquences.

Quoiqu'il en soit, ces formes de visionnage excessif de séries télé relèvent de comportements transitoires et sont bien moins graves en termes de conséquences que les plus traditionnelles addictions à l'héroïne ou aux jeux de hasard et d'argent. Et ces phénomènes restent à étudier bien au-delà des limites du concept d'addiction.

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PART I.

ACKNOWLEDGING, DEFINING AND CHARACTERIZING TV SERIES DEPENDENCE

CHAPTER ONE

ONLINE TV SHOWS AND SERIES ADDICTION:
AN EXPLORATORY FRANCOPHONE
CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARISON

OLATZ LOPEZ-FERNANDEZ

Introduction

TV viewing behaviour

Television (TV) show and series consumption is one of the most popular forms of media entertainment. At present, due to the effortless online accessibility of these types of audio-visual contents, their potentially unregulated consumption has started to draw the attention of the scientific community, for its potentially addictive nature. However, this is by no means a new phenomenon, as these addictive tendencies have been suggested before the Internet came into our lives during the 1990's, when TV viewing was considered a possible addiction (Finn 1992). For example, from the late 1970s mass media dependency had already received investigation:

> The primary reason for this focus [on television addiction] is that the degree of audience dependence on media information is a key variable in understanding when and why media messages alter audience beliefs, feelings or behaviours (…) Dependency is defined as a relationship in which the satisfaction of needs or the attainment of goals by one party is contingent upon the resources of another party (…) there are numerous ways in which people are dependent on media to satisfy information needs (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976, 3-4).

Furthermore, during this period research on the construct validity of 'television viewing' began development, as well as its etiological underpinnings. TV viewing was considered one of the central variables in

communication research that (at that time) was greatly understudied, especially as the consequences of TV viewing (predominantly negative; e.g., aggressive behaviours, Solomon and Cohen (1977)) suggested it was a multi-dimensional construct, dependent upon the specific broadcast content which, when viewed, interacted with human behavior. The resulting 'TV viewing' construct that was derived from this perspective consisted of:

 (1) a *social-situational factor* involving choice of behavior between activities; (2) a *transmission of a content repertoire* implying decision-making regarding messages; (3) a *source of content-messages* dealing with recall, comprehension, and attitude change; and (4) a *"language"* pertaining to the processes of encoding messages in the service of extracting knowledge (Solomon and Cohen, 1977, 265).

From the author's knowledge, the first factor establishes three specifics concerning TV viewing. First, that the preoccupation surrounding TV viewing dependency and addictiveness (by the viewer) comes from the behavior of viewing the contents, rather than from the technology (e.g., TV screen vs. computer monitor). Second, that new technological advancements in internet-enabled mobile devices (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) have re-energised concerns over the potential dependency on and addiction to TV. Especially series through online platforms such as *Netflix*. Third, that TV viewing was traditionally linked to external or situational factors such as to cultural, family and peer relationships, as well as to socio-cultural adaptations.

Time spent on TV viewing

The amount of time watching films, shows and series has been the traditional measure of TV viewing, commonly operationalised as hours per day or per week. This can be considered an objective or subjective measure of users' time, that is partly attached to the social-situational factor above (1), if the behaviour is socially developed for that individual.

However, this measure does not consider the characteristics of viewing behaviour, such as the choice between contents and messages processed, the motivations for viewing TV contents or a specific (set of) contents, and the perception and comprehension of the variety of messages. Moreover, these decision-making processes can be masked by time perception, as well as other variables such as selection of channels, shows, and series. This evidence could also be used to argue that TV viewing behaviour is a cognitive and emotional act (Robinson 1969, cited by Solomon and

Cohen, 1978, 267-268). Therefore, time is not necessarily a valid predictor for the behavioural changes attributed to TV viewing, especially if viewing is defined as a mental skill that leads to extraction of knowledge and emotions from coded messages (i.e., 'intelligence in the medium', as for example, to identify logical gaps; Olson, 1974; cited by Solomon and Cohen, 1978, 269).

Present research advances have taken this measure as one of the most relevant to account the quantity of online TV viewing. However, online viewing is much more complex, considering the possibility of choices available to the user, such as passive (TV programming done by TV channels, or through TV and computer sets) or active viewing (online platforms, websites, and internet-enabled devices with large selections of films, shows, and series to consume). Moreover, excessive time online is not always an indicator of a potential behavioural addiction, it may be an expression of a healthy social life directed by the Internet, or a form of coping with other life, medical, and mental health problems (Grohol 1999).

TV Cross-cultural viewing

To further the understanding of TV viewing behaviour, traditional research developed cross-cultural studies. These studies commonly assessed 'literate viewing', which has been considered a more valid measure of viewing the *messages* from TV (Solomon and Cohen, 1978: 268). More specifically, literate viewing pertains to the actual information extracted from a broadcast by the viewer, which has been useful for studies of attentional learning, attitudes, and needs in viewing behaviour. One specific cross-cultural study (Salomon 1977) compared the cognitive skills of American and Israeli children after viewing *Sesame Street*, finding that although the Americans watched more television, the amounts of literate viewing was higher in the Israeli sample.

The interest in cross-cultural research of TV viewing behaviour has continued its expansion to the management and marketing disciplines, rather than the communication or social sciences disciplines. Few studies, to the best of the authors' knowledge, have addressed research on TV viewing in different cultures. Aierbe, Orozco, and Medrano (2014) investigated the family context (parental mediation and family climate), TV viewing behaviour (time spent in front of the TV set), and perceived values of their favorite TV characters in Latin American, Spanish, and

Irish adolescents. They used a variety of questionnaires including the *Television Viewing Habits Questionnaire* (CH-TV.02; Medrano and Aierbe; cited by Aierbe et al., 2014, 87), the *Scale to assess three styles of television mediation* (Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, and Marseille, 1999), and *the Portrait Values Questionnaire* ((PVQ-21) by Schwartz 2003; adapted as a Val.TV 0.2 in Spanish by Aierbe et al., Val.TV 0.2). Of note, is that the CH-TV.02 and the Val.TV 0.2 were specifically adapted and revised by experts from all cultures, guaranteeing that TV viewing habits, values, and their respective definitions were applicable to and comprehensible within each culture. The findings indicated that a co-viewing mediation style (e.g., 'my parents and I share an interest in a program') was most commonly perceived by adolescents, followed by instructive (e.g., 'my parents try to help me understand what I see on TV') and restrictive mediation (e.g., 'my parents forbid me to watch certain programs'). Cross-cultural differences were also found, particularly in relation to the last mediation style. Although, a relationship was found between the time spent watching TV and mediation styles (especially in the Spanish sample), this was not the case between time viewing TV and family climate, with the exception of family cohesion.

Lastly, to the best of the author's knowledge, there has yet to be a cross-cultural investigation on the potential addictive properties of TV viewing, in comparison to those focusing on descriptive behavioural differences.

TV Dependency and potential addiction to viewing

The potentially negative effects of TV viewing were initially investigated during the 1970s, first focusing on associated aggressive tendencies (Solomon and Cohen, 1978). It was also during this time that (according to Peele, 1985) the term 'addiction' began its application to all type of excessive behaviours, including TV viewing, considered a major outlet for pain/tension reduction, enhanced sense of control, and the simplification and immediacy of experience.

During the 1990s, research modelling excessive TV viewing began development. McIlwraith (1990; cited by McIlwraith, Smith Jacobvitz, Kubey, and Alexander, 1991, 109-115) identified four theoretical explanatory models of TV addiction: as a consequence of (i) TV's effects on imagination and fantasy life, (ii) a function of TV's effects arousal level, (iii) a manifestation of oral, dependent or addictive personality, and (iv) a distinct pattern of uses and gratifications associated with the TV medium (e.g., dysphoric moods, filling time, disapproval of TV, other

video technologies, and divided attention). Furthermore, McIlwraith et al. (1991) reflected upon whether TV viewing was actually an addiction, considering that being 'hooked' on a particular TV show or series is not the same as being addicted to TV, as the latter suggests dependence on the TV medium independent of its content. These authors also point out that the first time dependency was referred to by the scientific community, it was described as a type of 'hypnotized state'. This term has since been substituted by 'addiction', which the authors also defend, due to TV viewing's ability to control us through its effects on us. Foss and Alexander (1996) compared self-defined heavy viewers (six hours per day) with nonviewers, finding the former perceived TV addiction as a likely outcome in others, but described the behavior as a form of relaxation and escape for themselves.

Reports such as these sparked the psychometric study of problematic TV viewing as a potential addiction in the 2000s, with initial measures modified from substance use dependence scales (Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Two lines of research subsequently emerged to study TV addiction, one based on the literature of viewers' experiences, and the other on psychiatric criteria.

McIlwraith (1998) published the first important empirical study on the assessment of TV addiction using scales provided by Smith (1981, 1986; cited by McIlwraith et al., 1991: 108), who operationalized this behavioural addiction based on descriptors in popular literatures, such as: (i) TV as a sedative, (ii) addiction due to insufficient satisfaction, (iii) absence of selectivity in viewing, (iv) feelings of a loss of control and (v) a loss of the sense of time passing, (vi) TV providing meaning and purpose in the lives, (vii) time being structured around the TV set, (viii) feelings about viewing too much, (ix) feelings of being angry with themselves for giving into the effects of TV (x) impatience towards the next viewing when away and unable to view (xi) intent of quitting and failure, and (xii) withdrawal symptoms when quitting. His findings were that 10% of adults (from all the different adulthood stages) perceived themselves as TV addicts; characterising themselves as more neurotic, introverted, and easily bored, whilst also suggesting motivations for viewing such as distraction, regulation of mood, and to fill time.

On the other hand, Hovarth (2004), following the tradition of considering TV viewing as a multifaceted phenomenon, selected a measure of behavioural addiction with four components: heavy viewing, problematic viewing, craving for viewing, and withdrawal. He based his research on the psychological addiction criteria from the fourth edition of

the Diagnostic and Statistical Manal of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV). He created five highly reliable (i.e., face and factorial validity) and valid statements to cover each of the seven criteria of addiction/dependence: (i) tolerance, (ii) withdrawal, (iii) unintended use, (iv) cutting down, and (v) time spent, (vi) displacement of other activities, and (vii) continued use. His findings showed that TV exposure was associated with increased TV addiction on all the above components, with specific relationships between with symptoms and behaviours emerging (e.g., withdrawal and viewing in the evening).

Potential addiction to online TV viewing

The latest viewing phenomenon of the 2010s is 'binge watching', the emerging behavioural trend of watching more than one episode in single sitting, or completely consuming one's schedule with an entire season or more in an uninterrupted session. This form of behaviour is commonly associated with digital TV shows and series distribution platforms, such as *Netflix* (Crisp 2015; Jenner 2016). However, binge watching has received significantly less debate relative to the rest of the TV viewing literature (Ramsay 2013), due to the nature and limits of binge viewing being not yet clearly defined. For example, it is considered that those who consume more than four episodes in a day (and who do not do so for professional reasons) may be considered binge-watchers. Moreover, the addictive threshold of binge watching is suggested in the quantity of episodes, rather than the quantity of hours viewing TV, in contrast to traditional approaches. Finally, other factors, above and beyond those associated with TV viewing, also appear to be related to this phenomenon (e.g., viewers' desire for autonomy in scheduling).

Sussman and Moran (2013) have recently summarised the literature on TV viewing as an addiction, concluding that more research is necessary. For this reason, the aim of this chapter is to explore the viewing of online TV shows and series in two European countries (France and Belgium), to observe its behavioural patterns, and the potential dependency in adult francophone viewers.

Method: Francophone cross-country comparison

Participants and procedure

This cross-sectional descriptive study collected survey data on a convenience sample of 887 adults, through announcements in four Francophone universities (Université catholique de Louvain [UcL], Université Paris Ouest Nanterre la Défense, Université de Nîmes Aix – Marseille, and Université de Lille III) from two different European countries. The participants were thus grouped into two sub-samples based on location (Belgium (48.5%) and France (51.5%)). Participants were aged between 18 and 79 years, with a mean (*M*) age of 19.28 years and a standard deviation (*SD*) of .74. The majority were female (85.3%), as data were collected in Psychology Faculties.

The ethical committee of the Psychological Sciences Research Institute (UcL) approved the study protocol. Participants voluntarily participated following confidentiality and anonymity assurance.

Instruments

The data were collected through an online survey program (*Qualtrics*) which comprised of three sections: (i) socio-demographics, (ii) behavioural patterns related with online viewing, and (iii) the *Compulsive Internet Use Scale* (CIUS; Meerkerk, Den Eijnden, Vermulst, and Garretsen, 2009) adapted into French by Khazaal et al. (2012). Only the subgroup of the sample who were online viewers completed the CIUS (66%, $n_{Belgium}$ = 322; n_{France} = 326).

The variables examined in the socio-demographic section included: gender, age, relationship status (single or not), education level (secondary education or higher), and occupation status (undergraduate or not).

Patterns of technology used for viewing were assessed by: usage of technologies (e.g., computer or laptop); average minutes per day spent using technology (outside work/study) on a typical weekday, and a typical weekend day; number of days per week engaging in online leisure activities; platforms used during the last year to watch TV and video shows (e.g., *YouTube, Netflix*).

To assess addictive use of the Internet, the French version of the 14-item CIUS (*Table 1*, Khazaal et al. 2012) was employed. Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 'Never' to 4 'Very often'; thus, total scores range from 0 to 56, with higher scores indicating higher compulsive Internet use (See *Table 1*).

Item	CIUS scale, "how often do you…"	Corresponding addictive symptoms
1.	"do you find it difficult to stop using the Internet when you are online"	Loss of control
2.	"do you continue to use the Internet despite your intention to stop"	Loss of control
3.	"do others (e.g., partner, children, parents) say you should use the Internet less?"	Conflict
4.	"do you prefer to use the Internet instead of spending time with others (e.g., partner, children, parents)?"	Preoccupation
5.	"are you short of sleep because of the Internet?"	Loss of control
6.	"do you think about the Internet, even when not online?"	Preoccupation
7.	"do you look forward to your next Internet session?"	Preoccupation
8.	"do you think you should use the Internet less often?"	Conflict
9.	"have you unsuccessfully tried to spend less time on the Internet?"	Loss of control
10.	"do you rush through your (home) work in order to go on the Internet?"	Conflict
11.	"do you neglect your daily obligations (work, school, or family life) because you prefer to go on the Internet?"	Conflict
12.	"do you go on the Internet when you are feeling down?"	Mood modification
13.	"do you use the Internet to escape from your sorrows or get relief from negative feelings?"	Mood modification
14.	"do you feel restless, frustrated, or irritated when you cannot use the Internet?"	Withdrawal

Table 1. Items of the Compulsive internet use scale (CIUS**;** Khazaal et al. 2012) and their respective correspondence to psychiatric addictive symptoms.

Results

The majority of participants were undergraduates, possessing the ability to access the Internet and TV shows and series on a daily basis through computers (see *Table 2*).

The CIUS scores were not significantly different between the European subsamples ($t_{(281)}$ = .15, p = .88; M Belgium (n = 259) = 18.84, SD = 9.91; M France (n = 326) = 19.3, SD = 10.37), nor did the very good reliability of the 14-item dependence scale (α = .89 for Belgium; α = .89 for France). The

item descriptions and respective measures of central tendency for each country are presented in *Table 3*. Items 1, 2 and 12 achieved a higher score in both samples relative to the other items, suggesting loss of control and mood modification cognitions may play an important role in excessive viewing behaviour. As can be seen in *Table 3*, there were slight differences in item responses between both countries.

From the whole sample, 67% considered consuming online TV shows, series, and films as one of their main activities ($n = 594$), but only 13.7% confirmed that this was their favorite online activity ($n = 34$). The profiles of these individuals were further explored, revealing that almost all were young females between 18 and 41 years old (85.3%), which was additionally observed in both individual countries (44.1% Belgian and 55.9% French viewers). The majority of the sample were also students (82.4%), single (62%), and watched online content almost daily (73%). Moreover, the entire subsample reported using a computer to facilitate viewing.

The results obtained through an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with the Principal Component (PC) technique were similar in both countries (Belgium: KMO = .88; Bartlett's test: $\chi^2_{(91)} = 1423.2$; $p < .001$; France: KMO = 85; Bartlett's test: $\chi^2_{(91)} = 1160.7$; $p < .001$) and yielded a unique factor: "compulsive Internet use", explaining 40.7% and 38.5% of the total variance in Belgian and French sample respectively.

Performing EFAs on the CIUS for those who rated TV show, series and film viewing as their favorite online activity ($n = 34$), descriptively revealed a light degree of preoccupation/salience (i.e., items 4 [Median (Mdn) = 1], 5 [Mdn = 1], 6 [Mdn = 1], and 7 [Mdn = 1]), some degree loss of control/relapse (e.g., items 1 [Mdn = 2], 2 [Mdn = 2], 9 [Mdn = 1], 10 [Mdn = 1]), conflict (i.e., items 8 [Mdn = 2] and 11 [Mdn = 1]), withdrawal (item 14 [Mdn = 2]) and, above all, mood modification/coping (e.g., items 12 [Mdn = 3] and 13 [Mdn = 2]). Finally, the CIUS in this group was positively and significantly correlated with both weekly viewing time and days of viewing per week (Time: $r = .51$, $p < .01$; Frequency: $r = .30$, $p < .05$).

Countries	Belgium ($N = 430$)	France ($N = 457$)
Gender		
Male	24.7%	17.9%
Female	75.3%	82.1%
Age	*24.42 (8.11)*	*23.9 (8.92)*
Civil status		
Single	62.1%	64.4%
In couple	27.3%	28.5%
Married	5.6%	4%
Separated/ Divorced	1.9%	2.1%
Legally cohabitating	3.1%	0.3%
Other (e.g., widow)	0%	0.6%
Profession		
Student	77.3%	83.7%
Employed	16.1%	7.4%
Without employment	0.9%	3.1%
Retired	0.6%	1.2%
Housewife/Househusband	0%	0.3%
Liberal profession	0%	1.8%
Other	0%	2.5%
Educational level		
Primary	0.6%	0.6%
Secondary	53.4%	21.5%
Higher (Bachelor, Master, and PhD)	46%	77.9%
Technology to view		
Computer	98.1%	98.8%
Time (minutes) spent on a typical		
weekday	*121.48 (90.4)*	*140.74 (202.28)*
weekend day in minutes	*174.26 (134.16)*	*215.63 (240.27)*
Days per week	*7.16(1.6)*	*6.81(1.9)*

Table 2. Sociodemographic information and mobile phones/smartphones usage patterns ($N = 887$; qualitative variables are shown with valid percentages and quantitative with mean *M* and (*SD*). Six participants chose not to disclose their age ($n_{Belgium} = 1$; $n_{France} = 5$), however all other variables received a 100% response rate

Items	Belgium (*n* = 259)		France (*n* = 326)	
n.	*Score*		*Score*	
	M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
1	*2.01*	*1.18*	*2.12*	*1.2*
2.	*1.94*	*1.3*	*2.08*	*1.3*
3.	*.82*	*11*	*.77*	*1.14*
4.	*.91*	*.96*	*.95*	*1.1*
5.	*1.16*	*1.1*	*1.29*	*1.3*
6.	*1.02*	*.99*	*.98*	*1.1*
7.	*1.25*	*1.1*	*1.18*	*1.19*
8.	*1.4*	*1.16*	*1.4*	*1.19*
9.	*.87*	*1.02*	*.87*	*1.15*
10.	*1.04*	*1.03*	*1.14*	*1.23*
11.	*1.22*	*1.12*	*1.05*	*1.29*
12.	*2.24*	*1.15*	*2.27*	*1.23*
13.	*1.71*	*1.26*	*1.9*	*1.32*
14.	*1.25*	*1.16*	*1.29*	*1.17*

Table 3. Item description of the CIUS (*N* = 585) (item number; and for each country mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*))

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to describe the online TV viewing behaviour in France and Belgium, in order to explore potential dependency on TV viewing in these adult francophone viewers.

TV show, film and series consumption appears to continue as one of the most popular entertainments in current media. The effortless accessibility, temporally unrestricted nature, and diversity of viewing platforms and locations of these contents may all contribute to unregulated TV consumption. These factors and the rapid expansion of internet-enabled technologies for streaming sites such as *Netflix,* have sparked a resurgence in attention from the scientific community, for the potentially addictive nature of TV viewing (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1976, Finn 1992, McIlwraith 1998, Hovarth 2004). However, in a novel direction