COMPETITION POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRY FOCUSED ON CONSUMERS' INTERESTS – A ROMANIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract
European cinema was and still is often assimilated by film consumers as art cinema which is more difficult to understand and ultimately to reach a big number of consumers. The objectives of this paper were to examine the pathway of European cinema market and the relationship with its consumers along with their interests and attitudes towards European films and to research the most important measures taken by European Union institutions under their competition policy to support European films through state aid schemes. In order to give shape to these objectives, in-depth interviews with five elite specialists from the Romanian film industry were used, specialists who possess international expertise and recognition. The problems of the qualitative research are: the modification of consumer behaviour face to European cinema and support measures.
The findings suggest that regarding its relationship with consumers and their interests in the seventh art, European cinema faces many different difficulties ranging from the competition with American films and insufficient funds, to the increased comfortableness or coziness of the movie consumers of our times.
The paper concludes with examples of measures suggested by the respondents, to help European cinema become more attractive to consumers, measures which are already being implemented by the industry, making the results of our study useful for policy and decision makers within this cultural area.

Keywords: European film industry, competition for European cinema, European Union state aid, European consumer of cinema.

JEL Classification: A14, D18, L41, Z10, Z18

Introduction

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Creative industries have a very important economic role in the European Union. In a reality dominated increasingly more by sound, images, ideas and symbols, activities and works resulting within the creative industries can generate significantly more value than ever before (Kong and O'Connor, 2009). Of all the works pertaining to creative industries, films have a considerable part in giving shape to European identities. European films in particular face strong competition from outside Europe. Also, there is little circulation of European audiovisual works outside their country of origin which can deprive the consumers of seeing movies created in other European states (European Commission, 2013).

After more than a century of existence cinema is continuously being menaced by more reachable and easier-going techniques for the consumers of bringing movies on demand to television and personal computers (Şerban, 2006). Therefore, it is important to support European films from different directions while respecting in the same time the interests of the consumers who want to watch more European films of good quality in cinema theaters to enrich their cinematic horizon, to personally develop and to facilitate the understanding of the European cultures.

The paper outlines within the section of literature review the most important articles in the field of cinema focused on consumers. Then, in the section of research methodology, there is a description of the methods used to examine how European cinema addressed during the time to its audience and of the support measures for the film industry taken by EU Member States, together with the European Commission respecting the interests of consumers. Results of the study which was based on interviews ofRomanian cinema personalities with international experience suggest that European cinema is facing several types of challenges: commercial, financial, focused on consumers, etc. The conclusions included certain proposals formulated with the help of the interviewed personalities to support European cinema in orderto increase its popularity, image and financial benefits thereby determining the study to be beneficial for the European film community.

1. Literature review

Interest in European cinema with focus on consumers has increased in recent years and one of the most relevant studies - belonging to Lipovetsky and Serroy (2007) specifies that European cinema of the 21st century announces itself to become more hypermodern borrowing characteristics from American films. The technological revolution changed also the broadcasting system of movies. The video market became popular during the '80s and it extended with the triumph of DVDs which took place of video cassettes at the end of the 90s and the beginning of the years 2000. Some statistics gathered from different periods of time reveal that ever since 1987 until the early 2000s, cinema theatres and hertzian TV represented less than half of the revenues: video and paid TV took the first spot among consumers' preferences. At the end of the 90s, box-office of American cinema theatres reached 6.98 billions of dollars face to 8.32 for video rents. In France the video market represented, between 2000 and 2005, around 2-2.2 billion euros which was a superior number compared to revenues from movie theatres. Since then until now new technologies emerged, but they are non-uniformly present for the film industries of different countries of the globe. The internet became a platform of broadcasting cinema and also VOD (video on demand) which came to gain 5% of the American consumers at the end of the 2000s (Lipovetsky and Serroy, 2007). In 2016 in the US, user penetration in the VOD segment is

46% while in Europe remains at lower levels: 31.83% for UK, 25.65% for France, 8.8% for Germany and with an overall European average of 12.69% (Nielsen, 2016).

Besides that, the rapid succession of peak technologies created a new universe of cinema consumption, a species of hyper consumer, whose interests tend to change on the background of the changes appeared in the industry, a consumer looking for movies more and more sensational, a high-tech aesthetics and shocking images chaining in an accelerated speed, features which are becoming present not only at the American consumer of movies but also more and more at the European one (Promorati, 2015).

All these changes tend to create a higher gap between the world of big American studios investing billions to produce films with pharaonic budgets and the space of non-American movies – among them we refer especially to European films – which are far to reach these records. However, the dominance of American movies on European markets along with the overall shorter movie lifecycle, the hunger of novelty and the overabundance of (American) films are slowly changing the preferences and interests of the European movie consumer in the detriment of European films, which become to be considered niche cinema (Lipovetsky and Serroy, 2007). Considering that, we can say that the movie consumerism of the current times became very individualistic, inconstant and unsynchronized – the traditional use of cinema was many times replaced by an unsystematic consumerism, a chaotic way of self-service (Competition Council, 2012).

The most important studies in this field focused on the consumer compiled periodically are made by the European Commission. One of the latest studies of this kind states that although European consumers of cinemahave a wealth of entertainment and leisure alternatives available at their fingertips their interest in European film is kept with small fluctuations (European Commission - Attentional, Headway International and Harris Interactive, 2015). In this study it is also offered a classification of European film consumers comprising five categories:

- Hyper-connected movie addicts (24% of the total audience of European films) are usually digital enthusiasts, mostly male and young adults. They live mainly in urban areas, are well acquainted with mass-media and culture and well equipped with media devices. Movie addicts recognize specific qualities and values of European films, agreeing that they are original, with provocative ideas, slow and intimate and that they have diverse and complex characters.

- Rushed independent movie selectives (22% of the viewers of European films) are usually adults with few or no children, women aged between 26 and 50 years, with average income, with a fairly high level of education and professionally integrated in academia or culture. Consumers in this group are strong supporters of European cinema in general, which, according to them, is less stereotypical and at least as good as US cinema. They appreciate the quality, diversity, originality and they relate to European films (they believe that they offer "good stories", they "get close" more to the audience, and reflect European culture and society.) They also pay high attention to film critics that they follow with interest and that influence them in a significant manner (Wallentin, 2016).

- Mainstream blockbusters lovers (16% of the total of European film viewers) watch mainly American movies. Their socio-demographic profile and interest to equip themselves with technology varies around the average. They have less access to cinemas and their opinion towards European films is that they are too focused on social issues, that in general, these movies present ”dark” characters and intrigues and that they are less attractive than American movies.

- Occasional hit grazers (21% of the total audience for European films) view a smaller number of movies and they are less connected to media and culture in general. These consumers are usually younger women, from semi-urban or rural areas. Despite watching fewer films compared to the previous categories of consumers, their interest in European films is relatively strong, considering that these movies have visual undeniable visual and artistic qualities, but they are not sufficiently present on the screens in their community / region.

- Movie indifferents (16% of the total of European film viewers) view the fewest movies of all categories of film consumers, and generally are not employed in many cultural activities. They are usually either young or older men with low educational and income levels, living in rural and semi-urban areas and less-equipped with devices and media services. They are not interested in movies than those of action and comedy, and mostly watch US blockbusters.

Regarding admissions in movie theatres from European Union, it must be mentioned that in 2015 in contrast to 2014, a growth was recorded, dominated by the powerful performances of a number of US films. On a cumulative basis, admissions to US films increased in 2015 by around 50 million compared 2014 leading to a market share of 64%, while the biggest box office boost came from the renewed strength of UK films produced with incoming US investment (GB inc) making the market share for European films produced in Europe with incoming US investment to rise from 0.4% to 7.3% (as seen in table no. 1). Admissions for European films on the other hand, dropped which provoked the European market share in the EU to decline from its exceptional 2014 record level of 33.5% to an estimated 26.1% for 2015.

Table no. 1: The EU film market share by country of origin of the film 2011-2015 (%)

Region of origin	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
US	61,6	62,3	69,5	63,2	64,0
EUR inc/US	8,1	6,9	1,1	0,4	7,3
Europe	28,5	29,3	26,2	33,5	26,1
Other	1,8	1,5	3,2	2,9	2,6

Source: European Audiovisual Observatory, Council of Europe Strasbourg, 2016

After suffering a small temporary fall in 2014 the EU production levels continued their growth trend of recent years, as the estimated number of European feature film productions increased from 1.593 to 1.643 theatrical films (as seen in Table no. 2). This number can be divided into an estimated 1.127 fiction films (69%) and 516 feature documentaries (31%). The increase in production activity was primarily linked to an increasing number of co-productions which accounted for 24% of total production volume in 2015 (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2015).

Table no. 2: Number of feature films produced in the European Union 2011-2015

Type of production	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Feature fiction films	1096	1103	1130	1099	1127
Feature documentaries	451	462	477	494	516
Total feature films	1547	1565	1607	1593	1643

Source: European Audiovisual Observatory, Council of Europe Strasbourg, 2016

As media analyst M. Gubbins (2014) points out in his study ”Audience in the mind”, the paradigm ”access versus ownership”, used to interpret changes in consumer behaviour, can also be applied to the audiovisual industry. Business models based on access (like streaming and Video on Demand platforms) are gaining momentum to the detriment of those one based on ownership (like download). Traditional models of ownership, understood as the possession of physical objects and supports, are definitely declining (Gubbins, 2014). When it comes to these subscription Video on Demand services the most powerful in the world are Netflix, HBOGo, Hulu Plus and Amazon Video (Figure no. 1).

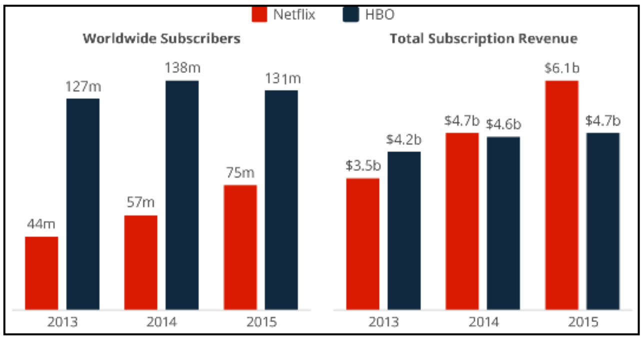

Figure no. 1: Number of worldwide subscribers and total subscription revenues for HBO and Netflix

Source: Time Warner, Netflix, n.d. cited in Rosoff, 2016

Figure no. 1 above illustrates that the total subscription revenue gained by Netflix from the part of the consumers and its number of subscribers has grown over time which means that people worldwide spend more time watching movies from home. The same trend regarding the revenues occurred to HBO as well, even though the number of subscribers has suffered a little reduction in 2015.

In terms of competition policy in European cinema and the role of state aid for European films, Member States fulfilled a large range of support measures for the production of films, TV programmes and other audiovisual works. Altogether, Member States provide under the competition policy an estimated EUR 3 billion of film support per year through over 600 national, regional and local support schemes (Kanzler and Talavera, 2015).

With this support, the EU has become one of the largest producers of films in the world trying with every year to maintain an active interest from the part of movie consumers. The EU cinema industry produced 1.299 feature films in 2013 compared to 817 in the US, or 1.255 in India. In 2013, Europe counted 933.3 million cinema admissions and the European audiovisual market for filmed entertainment was valued at EUR 17 billion and over one million people are employed in the audiovisual sector in the European Union (European Commission, 2013).

This makes film production and distribution not only a cultural but also a significant economic activity. Furthermore, film producers are active on an international level and audiovisual works are traded internationally. This means that such aid given under the umbrella of the competition policy in the form of grants, tax incentives or other types of financial support is liable to affect trade between Member States (European Commission, 2014). Moreover, the producers and audiovisual works which receive such support are likely to have a financial and hence competitive advantage over those which do not. The assessment criteria for State aid for the production of films were originally set out in the 2001 Cinema Communication, revised in 2013. This new "Cinema Communication" is an important update to the audiovisual State aid assessment framework as it takes account how the European audiovisual industry has evolved and how the European consumers' interests towards European films changed during the time. It is previewed that the new rules will contribute to the continued viability and competitiveness of the European audiovisual sector.

2. Research methodology

The main objectives to be researched within this study are: to investigate the changes in the behaviour of the European consumer of European cinema during the time and the factors leading to those changes (as the first objective); to examine the measures implemented at community level (state aid, etc) in order to support European cinema so that an increase of interest from the European consumers for European films takes place in the future and in the same time the perspectives of developing those measures (the second objective). The two objectives can be achieved by performing a qualitative research, the most appropriate strategy for this subject since this type of research seems to be more appropriate to study the problems of the contemporary world, marked by changes and characterized by a plurality of opinions (Jodelet, 2003). The using of the qualitative research strategy for this particular study resides also in the fact that the previewed research objectives regard the description and explanation of events or experiences (Cocorada, 2014).

From the specific methods of qualitative research the interview was chosen for this study. We decided on this research method given the fact that it is richer in content than a survey and more flexible, providing the opportunity to ask for clarifications and further information at the end of the interview. The implicit mode of understanding in qualitative research involves alternative ideas concerning social knowledge, meaning, reality, and truth in social science research, the basic subject matter being no longer objective data to be quantified, but meaningful relations to be interpreted (Kvale, 1996).

Interviews are more flexible, whatever their structure, ranging from "listening in" and asking questions in a real-life setting to the standardized recording schedules used by the market researchers. The relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is interactive, allowing for a degree of adjustment and clarification. Moreover, the value of the interview data is that they are often compelling and illuminating (Gillham, 2005). The main advantage of the interview as research method is its ability to provide multiple perspectives on a studied topic (Jensen and Jankowski, 1991). In addition, it reduces the likelihood of non-answers.

Given the fact that we intended to understand how the behaviour of the European consumer of (European) cinema had changed and how European cinema is supported at EU level, we concluded that the interview method was more advantageous. We opted for interviews with elites from the cinema industry, namely with specialists in cinema studies with different distinctions acquired in their career in order to capture their perceptions, experiences and knowledge of European cinema and its consumers. These interviews with elites are appropriate because they can provide a multidimensional, rich understanding of and insight into the occurrences in the European cinema field.

We chose semi-structured interviews because they allow greater freedom in terms of addressing additional questions next to the guide, questions which are necessary to clarify some opinions expressed by the interviewees. Even the most rigid inverview scheme may be adjusted during the process, the researcher being free to follow certain directions and develop questions (Jensen and Jankowski, 1991).

Qualitative research uses research questions and sometimes hypotheses to outline the focus and scope of the study. The qualitative research questions point at the relationship between the researched variables, while the hypothesis are predictions that the researcher makes regarding the relationship expected between variables (Creswell, 2009). The hypothesis are based on numerical estimations of the values of the studied variables and have to be tested based on the data collected using statistical methods. Taking into account the specific of the chosen research method, but also because our study involves interviews with elite personalities and getting a relatively small number of entries, we chose to formulate research questions and not hypothesis. They replace the hypothesis when conducting the research, and by taking them and the results into accout hypotheses can be formulated for future research directions.

Considering the objectives set, we advanced the following research questions:

- What is the current relationship between cinema, on one hand, and television and renting movies online, on the other hand, from the points of view of European consumers?
- What factors determine the decrease of the consumers’ interest in European films?
- How can the number of consumers of European films be increased? Can measures implemented at Community level (state aid, etc.) be used to support European cinema?

Taking into consideration these research questionsand the goal of our qualitative research, we developed an interview guide that focused on the European cinema and its consumers (Table no. 3). For this study seven interview questions were formulated in order to give shape to the problem investigated: the changes in the behaviour of the European consumer of (European) cinema.

Table no. 3: Interview guide used in the research

Nr.	Question
1.	How do you feel about the current relationship between cinema on one hand and TV (paid TV included) and movie rentals online on the other hand from the European consumers’ points of view? Is it divergent or complementary?
2.	What are the things that in your perspective keep European consumers away from consuming cinema? What are the European cinema’s competitors in 2016?
3.	According to the European Audiovisual Observatory the rate of admissions to films released in Europe for 2015 compared to 2014 grew with 7,4%. Do you think this trend will continue to grow in the next years?

Nr.	Question
4.	Even if the overall admissions rate in Europe grew last year, admissions for European films on the other hand declined causing European market share in the EU to drop from its exceptional 2014 record level of 33.5% to an estimated 26.1% in 2015 (as only two European films made it into the top 20, French action thriller Taken 3 and German comedy Fack ju Göhte 2). What could be the reasons for this drop in the interest for European movies (related to the consumers)?
5.	How would you describe the process of broadcasting European movies outside their country (specifically in other countries from the European Union)?
6.	How can Europeans "sell" their cinema between each other? Do you think that a higher extent of cable TV in the European Union could help reaching more consumers?
7.	Do you think that State aid schemes provided by the European Commission to boost the European film industry could change the European market share in the EU and determine a largest interest for European movies from European consumers?

Thus, the guide developed around a few important themes: the relationship between cinema on one hand and television and movie rentals online on the other hand, the European cinema's main competitors, the elements that restrict the consumption of European cinema, the trends in the industry and the factors that drive them, the reasons for the drop in the consumers' interest for European movies, the distribution of such movies outside the country of their production. Once with the implementation of State aid schemes provided by the European Commission to boost the European film industry, the European market share in EU could change and a bigger interest in European movies from the part of European consumers could be provoked, but also a more precise pursuit of the respect of consumers' interests in this industry because these schemes impose stricter conditions and a more careful control. This is the reason why the interview guide refers alsoto the support schemes given by the European Commission to stimulate the European cinema industry.

An additional way to strengthen the study is through triangulation, a term taken from geodesy where every point on the surface can be located by two other landmarks (Bitsch, 2005). Thus, research weaknesses of a method may be offset by the strengths of others (Jick, 1974 cited in Jensen and Jankowski, 1991). Of the four main forms of triangulation of data and of investigators, of theory and method (Jensen and Jankowski, 1991), research is mainly based on the one the experts coming from different areas of the industry and who can offer different perspectives on the topic.

The participants in our study comprise a valuable group of five cinema elite experts with different positions within the field and extensive experience at European level. All the specialists can be considered as part of the cinema elite because they are all influential, prominent and well-informed (Dexter, 2006). Even though the sample is small, there are arguments which justify this size. Elite interviews give advantage to the research because all the persons who were consulted have an experience in cinema (whether it is production, distribution, acting or film critique), between twenty and thirty years and they are part of a network of persons capable of making decisions or influencing processes in cinema which are important for many other people involved in these processes and also for the society (the cinema consumers) which is impacted by this form of art. Moreover, the sample includes people having different occupations within the cinema field which gives the research the variety needed to obtain significant results.

First, we interviewed face-to-face Irina Margareta Nistor, a very famous film critic and translator also surnamed in the media as "the voice of the Romanian film" with over thirty years of experience in cinema. Her achievements are over standing for the Romanian cinema: she worked for The Romanian Television from 1980 until 1999, first as a film translator, then as a program producer. She produced many TV and radio programs about cinema, she is curator or jury member in many film festivals such as Dakino, Namur or the Psychoanalysis and Film Festival which she launched in 2012, she took interviews to personalities ranging from Charles Aznavour to Francis Ford Coppola and she dubbed over 3000 films.

The second face-to face interview was with Medeea Marinescu, who started her career as an actress at three years old, having played in over 20 movies so far – some of them being French productions with great success for the French public- and many theatre plays not only in Bucharest, but also in London, Bruxelles or Paris. She was awarded in 2004 by the Romanian president with the Cultural Merit Order in degree of Cavalier, D Category - "Arts of spectacle", and in 2016 she was decorated by the French Ambassador in Romania with the Cultural Merit Order in degree of Cavalier for her talent as an actress and her involvement social causes.

We met personally with the third, fourth and fifth experts and explained them what are the objectives of our research and how their contribution could make the outcome more reliable. They gave us some ideas during the meetings and they agreed to provide more details over email as they do not benefit of too much time for face-to-face interviews. We received their very meticulous and particularised answers in almost a week from the moment when the meetings took place.

The third expert interviewed was film producer Velvet Moraru – general manager of the house of film production Icon Production. During the 90s she worked as production director at the Visual Arts Foundation and in 1994 she created Icon Production where she activates as film producer. She was production director or executive producer for much appreciated Romanian movies such as: “The sweet bread of exile” (2002 – director: Alexandru Solomon) or “The other Irina” (2008 – director: Andrei Gruzsniczki). She also collaborated with other production houses but the true measure of her vocation resides in the films produced at Icon such as “Exam” (2003) and “The autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu” (2010) – the last one being considered by many Romanian film critics the best movie of the year, being awarded at the Gopo Awards the distinction of “Best documentary of the year”. The fourth specialist consulted was Matei Truță who is working as distribution and production manager for Transilvania Film, an ambitious cinema, video and TV distribution company for a series of very select arthouse titles, including prized winners at the most important international film festivals. He is part of the same team that has been and still is “responsible” of the great success of the biggest film festival in Romania: Transilvania International Film Festival (TIFF). The fifth person who advised us was film director, photographer and writer Alex Iureș, who has more than ten years of experience in cinema having among others worked as assistant director for Francis Ford Coppola. He grew up in a famous family of filmmakers being exposed from an early age to the paths of the film industry and the movie consumers’ culture.

After collecting the empirical data from the respondents a decisive step of the research followed – the data interpretation. All interviews were taken either face to face, audio taped and after wards transcripted for content analysis, either by email communication. Transcripts from all interviews were available and used for data analysis. Qualitative research is a strategy that usually emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2004). Therefore, data analysis involved content analysis techniques in which we focused on categories of words and themes representatives for the assumed research objectives.

3. Findings and discussions

In the beginning, our aim was to determine whether the current relationship between cinema on one hand and TV (paid TV included) and movie rentals online on the other hand from the European consumers' points of view is divergent or complementary. The complementarity of the relationship is given by the different collaborations between film production companies. However, online movie piracy remains a big concern for keeping the consumers' interests for cinema alive. We give below some of the answers of our respondents:

"…The main current connection between cinema and TV focuses on the idea of production, co-production, in which public and private TV involves itself taking also an immediate advantage given the fact that it can further broadcast the respective productions, often without large investments.… therefore, from this point of view there is a complementary relationship between cinema and TV. However, what the consumers miss in cinema, they recover on TV. Unfortunately, sometimes they jump over the first phase through illegal online movie watching." "…If we have to speak about the consumption of European film at cinema, TV and VOD (video on demand) respectively as preferences/tendencies of consumption from the public, in Romania, for example, dominates the European film consumption at cinema. Currently, from the perspective of a distribution company, less than 5% of annual income comes from VOD, while less than 10% from films sold to TV. In Romania, the VOD and online movie renting market is underdeveloped and marked by a high degree of piracy which can determine a divergent relationship with the cinema circuit of movies. A part of the consumers would choose to see a movie illegally online for free rather than go to cinema which can modify in timp their interest for cinema experience."

Another reason for which the current relationship between cinema and TV was hard to be labelled as fully complementary or fully divergent was mentioned: the gradual richness of TV shows in which Hollywood superstars are casted holds the consumers close to their TV and far from the cinema theatres: "The consumers say why should I make the effort to go to cinema to see Jude Law when I can see him at home in the TV show "The young pope" on HBO?". This aspect is not necessarily seen as a threat by our cinema experts (although four experts agree that comfortableness/ cosiness is the general characteristic of the European consumer of European cinema) as "these alternative platforms are an opportunity for filmmakers, not an obstacle and even though television and online movie consumption are more convenient from all points of view, this is just a natural consequence of technological expansion we all live and this should be exploited by filmmakers in order to give complementarity to the relationship between cinema and TV."

A succinct analysis of these responses leads us to the following: the unanimous conclusion drawn by all experts who were consulted is that the relationship between cinema and TV is rather complementary than divergent but all experts had similar reserves in characterising the relationship as fully complementary because of a main threat: online movie piracy (figure no. 2 on the next page).

Experts have characterized the film consumer from contemporary society ”as the increasingly selfish, not caring about the losses of film studios due to piracy, because the interest to watch movies as quickly, cheaply and comfortably as possible is constantly exceeding the desire of cinematic experience.”

When the experts were asked what are the things that in their perspective keep European consumers away from consuming cinema and what are the European cinema’s competitors in 2016 all of them mentioned as the biggest competition for European cinema, the cinema of United States that comes with blockbusters, superhero mega special effects, well known celebrities and serious investment in marketing – which along with an efficient communication of the film message can crea the premises of a strong relationship with the consumers (Păduraru et al, 2016). An overall analysis of answers for question two is made in figure no. 2 from the next page but it needs to be commented in detail as it follows: Two of the experts made reference to the fact that European cinema is trying to protect itself by laws, that suppose national film broadcasting in certain percentages, however, the percentages are not always respected by broadcasters, which naturally pursue profit.

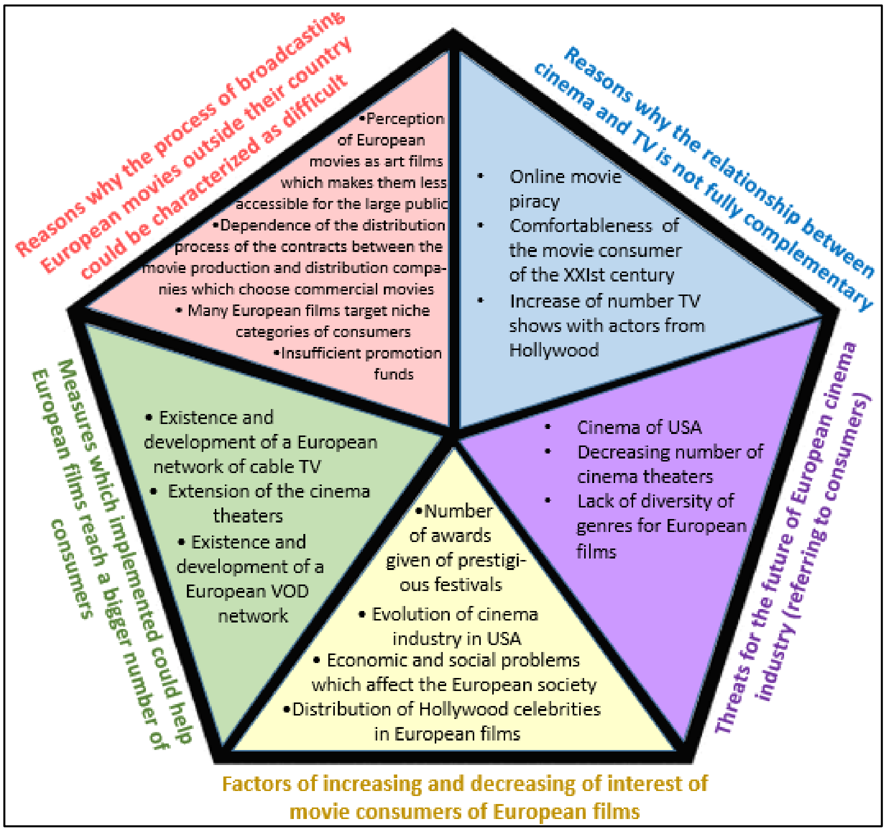

Figure no. 2: Synthesis of the answers of the five questions addressed to the interviewed personalities

Source: arrangement of own data obtained within the interviews with specialistsin cinema

Other concerns of the experts which are required to be set out, were the decreasing number of art cinema theatres at European level (pointed out by four experts who also mentioned the predilection of European filmmakers to make art movies) and of cinema theatres in general in Romania – an overall worry for all our specialists: "European (Romanian included) films are usually art films and art films are a niche that currently has to compete with commercial films, in commercial spaces such as Malls or Multiplex sites. Art films are difficult to be placed on these screens and even more difficult to maintain there. For Romania it is worth to be said that RADEF network (the Autonomous Administration of Film Distribution and Exploitation) is an institution which held approximately 600 cinemas in 1990. Now there are just 10 cinemas active in RADEF. A larger network of cinema theatres has to be built in Romania."

Another burden of Romanian cinema is represented by the reduced number of Romanian movies made per year which is a feature characteristic for cinemas of other East-European countries as well: "…the Romanian cinema industry cannot survive with so few movies. It is necessary to have a diversity of movies - we made films awarded at famous festivals but those are films with highly targeted consumers which are a small group. If you want to have a cinema industry to resist – resistance comes with diversity (of styles, genres, chosen themes/subjects)."All these difficulties experienced by European cinema can change over time the consumer preferences of European film because "if the industry can not be supported to overcome the problems, consumers (even the most loyal) can lose interest and migrate to US independent or Asian films (the last one being an industry continously growing)."

For the question: "according to the European Audio-visual Observatory the rate of admissions to films released in Europe for 2015 compared to 2014 grew with 7.4%. Do you think this trend will continue to grow in the next years?" the answers were reserved in giving a definitive ascending or descending trend as in the opinion of our five experts the interest of the European consumers for watching European movies at cinema is a complex thing depending on several factors.

First off all the recognition of the films with awards at prestigious festivals of profile: Cannes, Venice or Berlin is a definite chance to increase the interest of European consumers in seeing the movies – aspect highlighted by all the five specialists we consulted. Four of them indicated that every trend cinema depends on the way American cinema evolves, two of the answers tackling the issue of casting Hollywood actors in European films in order to increase the interests of movie consumers for the European productions. Two of the interviewees also mentioned economic and social problems that can have an impact within this problem, explaining as follows: "...the media keeps saying that we overcame the economic crisis but it is not true. People can seek refuge at the cinema - but again, if the movies are more complicated - art films- as European films usually are, the effect may be the opposite. People want to "escape" at cinema not to be put face to face with their problems". Figure no. 2 synthesises the things on which the evolution of the interest for European films from the part of the consumers depends.

The question "Even if the overall admissions rate in Europe grew in 2015, admissions for European films on the other hand declined causing European market share in the EU to drop from its exceptional 2014 record level of 33.5% to an estimated 26.1% in 2015 (as only two European films made it into the top 20, French action thriller Taken 3 and German comedy Fack ju Göhte 2). What could be the reasons for this drop in the interest for

European movies (related to the consumers)?" was met with a consensus: the overall weakness of the European movie industry in front of Hollywood and the star-system created there. Specialists agreed once again that the European consumers (based on box-office reports) prefer to see action movies built on American recipes (with English titles even if they are French – the first example: Taken 3) or comedies lightly impudent, respecting the American pattern as well, but with local actors that do not need to be dubbed or subtitled. The general opinion was that most European consumers (Romanians included) have arrived to see the cinema theatre as an entertainment rather than art or a way to evolve culturally and one of the reasons could be the overgrowing lack of cinema or even visual education of the European consumers.

The next goal was to find out how would the experts describe the process of broadcasting European movies outside their country (specifically in other countries from the European Union). They were not shy in characterising it as difficult. On the whole experts stated that consumers' perception of European films is to assimilate them as art films or films with valences of art films which are not accessible for a large public. It is well known that a European Film requires a greater effort in terms of promotion for it to perform and it is difficult to give it a long cinema circuit (and the life duration within the cinema circuit of a film is given by its number of spectators). Four specialists also told us that it is hard to expand European films beyond a niche category of consumers, who are in general more culturally aware and interested in expanding their knowledge in cinema.

The general belief (expressed by four experts) is that, the process of movie broadcasting depends heavily on the deals made between production and distribution companies and that several movies being included in the category of commercial films are sold even before being produced. The problem of insufficient promotion funds especially compared to American films was expressed by three of the persons who were consulted for the study. One expert (the film critic) gave many details about particular actions taken at EU level to support the broadcasting of different European movies: "…The distribution of European films sometimes operates in a sort of exchange between countries and a support system of European productions is in vigour including the prize founded 10 years ago by the European Parliament – the Lux Prize. The objective of the LUX Prize is to illuminate the public debate on European integration and to facilitate the diffusion of European films in the European Union. The LUX Prize consists of assistance in the form of subtitling and video-to-film transfer (kinescopage) of the winning film in the 23 official EU languages (including the film's original language, for the hearing impaired). In addition, there are film festivals exclusively for European films and permanent attempts (in the form of financial funds) to support them financially, in different stages: creation, development, distribution." Overall four reasons stood out as seen in figure no. 2.

The experts' answers for the questions "How can Europeans "sell" their cinema between each other? Do you think that a higher extent of cable TV in the European Union could help reaching more consumers?" were that Europe needs a European network for gaining a higher number of consumers for European films. However, the type of this network varied in the responses of the specialists consulted for this study (also seen in figure no. 2). Some considered a European cable TV as very useful: "…There is already a sales network of European film at television level, for example any HBO Europe production is disseminated in all countries where HBO is present (including Romanian series such as "In deriva", "Shadows", "The mute valley" and documentaries like " Toto and his sisters "or" Chuck

Norris vs. Communism ") therefore a European cable TV is definitely necessary to increase the number of consumers of European films". Other experts see other elements as more important than a European cable network such as the extension of the cinema theatres network or even the development of a European VOD network: "…The most important extension needed to reach more European movie consumers in the one of cinema theatreswhereas the primary interest of European film consumer is to enjoy the experience of watching a European movie in cinema theater" or "…The solution being discussed is closer to a European video-on-demand network, not cable. However, although the idea of making the European content more accessible for Europeans is attractive, there has not been found yet an appropriate business model to implement VOD without compromising film distribution in theatres."

Another relevant element to be considered at European level is that if the campaign launch in cinema of a movie does not occur in every country according to the specific historical and socio-political context of each country, the film is likely to go unnoticed by the European consumerswho differ from country to country and from culture to culture. They have different behaviors (of consuming), attitudes, national film culture and experiences lived at the cinema theater and in consequence movie promotion campaigns should address European consumers considering these factors.

The last point was to discover if the experts think that State aid schemes provided by the European Commission could boost the European film industry, change the European market share in the EU and increase the interest of European consumers for European films. Most specialists have similar perspectives in thinking that the EU Schemes are beneficial but insufficient. One expert triggered us the attention with a nuance element: "These aid schemes can be an important incentive, but it should be accompanied by the aforementioned visual education, a subject almost completely absent from the Romanian school."

Some limitations of this study can be found in the fact that face-to-face interviews would have been necessary with all respondents because during this type of interviews the answers of the interviewees are more spontaneous, without an extended reflection and can lead the discussion to developed ideas giving the interviewer extra information. The face-to-face interviews could have been useful also because of the social cues it provides, such as voice, intonation, body language etc. of the interviewees which can give the interviewer a lot of extra information that can be added to the verbal answer of the interviewees on a question. However, given the fact that the persons who were consulted are all elites in the cinema industry their time was limited and their wishes had to be respected, having to recourse at a compromise solution: the email interview. Nevertheless, the email interviews gave the interviewees time to construct very rich in content responses to our questions (with examples and many details about particular topics).For the future research that we plan, which will explore various branches of creative industries, we consider the use of the focus-group that could enhance interactivity and discussion of complex problems such as those faced by the creative industries, especially following the unprecedented use of new technologies that can significantly reshape consumer preferences regarding film, music, visual art, design, literature, etc.

Conclusions

In the sunrise of the twenty-first century, when it comes to viewing movie content, the digitally connected environment is driving profound changes in the way European consumers watch films. In the United States motion pictures, broadcast television, cable and satellite systems, radio networks, newspapers and magazines, book publishers, manufacturers of home entertainment products, sports teams, Internet service providers constitute different elements that often come together in various corporate combinations under the notion that each would boost the others.

The European film industry is far to reach this grandness of a system. European films suffer from heavy competition from the part of American films and the number of entries in cinema theatres fluctuates from year to year due to an apparent indecision of focusing on art films or on commercial films the last being nowadays compulsory to sustain the industry because they suscitate much more the interests of the movie consumers. Europe cannot seem to find a way to sustainably produce both types of movies mentioned before and more, as the film industry needs diversity to survive and continue to be appreciated by critics and to nourish the consumers' interests– to watch European movies of good quality at cinema theaters, to understand better the multiple facets of European cinema culture and to live experiences which can help them in their personal development. Under the competition policy, the European Commission through its state aid schemes for the audiovisual (the Media funds, the Creative Europe program or the Lux Prize) tries to support as much as it can the production and distribution of valuable European films because they have to deal with competition coming from different directions: American movies, television and VOD.

Based on the interviews with five Romanian cinema personalities with international expertise in the study of movie consumption, we found out that the future of European cinema is threatened by American films and the decreasing number of cinema theatres – the last finding a possible solution in the EU funds granted under the competition policy in the form of state aids. It is very hard to compete with the American film industry, because it is so well built and organised, providing multiples genres of movies and coming with serious investment in marketing. A wider network of theatres in Europe, especially in Eastern Europe (where many state-owned cinema theatres where demolished) could be a useful measure in building a larger audience whose interest to see movies in cinema theaters is more and more fluctuant. Therefore, other measures already in process of implementation within the whole Europe in order to make European films reach a higher number of consumers are the development of a European cable television or of a European VOD network.

This made us conclude that cinema cannot exist without the fineness and the subtility of European film but in order to become a strong competitor for American movies in the eyes of the consumers and their interests and preferences, more private funds need to be allocated in order to produce and distribute European films, more investment in cinema theatres needs to be put in place and a more diversity of genres needs to be approached by European filmmakers.

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