

Exploring Attitudes towards a Recent Hungarian Film: analysing a Special Case with Qualitative Methods

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The Hungarian film industry and finances have shifted after the regime change. Since then, domestic films have attracted fewer Hungarian viewers to cinemas, a phenomenon that the viewership of the film Futni mentem (Gone Running), released at the end of 2024, seemed to have challenged. The aim of this study is to examine attitudes towards the film utilizing three qualitative methods. Content analysis and an expert in-depth interview were conducted to analyze the film's communication platforms and method. Comments on social media posts were examined from a qualitative perspective to identify the most frequently recurring themes and attitudes. The results show that the film and its outstanding viewership are divisive among the commenters. Clusters can be formed based on the commenters' knowledge and attitudes towards the film, which include the groups of enthusiastic fans, the interested ones, the outraged individuals, the disappointed, the skeptics and the domestic film avoiders.

Keywords: Gone Running, content analysis, expert in-depth interview, netnography, comment analysis

1. Introduction

Film consumption habits have changed significantly over the past decade, especially in the past 5 years since the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the previously popular consumption of cable television, the role of cinemas also seems to be faltering, while streaming services are becoming more and more popular globally. Among domestic Hungarian consumers, alternative viewing options are becoming increasingly significant besides traditional film consumption forms (Horváth–Gyenge 2022).

The Hungarian film industry has undergone significant changes since the regime change, both on the supply and demand sides. Consumers have become less “enthusiastic” about domestic films and have started to prefer foreign films (Valociková–Kolnhofer-Derecskei 2018). However, two Hungarian films that were released at the end of 2024 emerged as counterexamples to this trend.

The film Futni mentem (*Gone Running*) (Herendi et al. 2024) first broke the viewership records set since the regime change, which was closely followed and then surpassed in this regard by the “How Could I Live Without You?” titled work. The previously mentioned “Gone Running” was made without governmental funding, and at the time when the research problem was raised, it was leading in domestic cinema attendance, so the current research focuses on this film.

Considering the viewership data from the regime change until February 2, 2025, the previous record holder was “Out of Order”. This film attracted 662 963 people to the cinemas, but the two previously mentioned films have already surpassed the 700 000 mark since then.

Based on the above, it is evident that despite the previously observed trends, the beforementioned Hungarian films resulted in a phenomenon that could not have been anticipated. These so-called special cases raise further questions regarding the examination of Hungarian consumers' domestic film consumption and, fundamentally, their openness to Hungarian films (Takács 2017).

The aim of the research is to explore what consumer attitudes are associated with the unusually high popularity film "Gone Running" despite the lower viewer numbers of domestic films in the Hungarian film environment. Overall, based on the aforementioned points, answers to the following research question are sought:

- How do consumers perceive the success of the Hungarian film „Gone Running”?
- What was the audience's perception of the film, and did this perception change when the film became available on one of the largest streaming platforms in addition to being played in theaters?

In the study, the relevant literature is presented first. Then, the state of the Hungarian film industry is discussed. After presenting the theoretical background, the methodology of the primary research and then its results are discussed. Finally, in summary, the research questions are answered.

2. Theoretical Background

In the theoretical overview, I will first briefly address the current changes in the film industry, then present the film as a partially objectified service product. After that, the history of Hungarian cinema will be briefly presented, followed by an examination of the current state of the Hungarian film industry.

2.1. Changes in the Film Industry

The film industry, and film as an element of culture, has been and continues to be present in a changing environment over the past century. After the domestic spread of cinemas, the rise of televisions, specifically the appearance of commercial channels, brought a change to this milieu (Lőrinc 2016, NMHH 2023). Later, the world of the internet made these moving images available on multiple platforms and from various sources, with the latest "achievements" being the streaming services (GKID 2022, NMHH 2023, Magyar 2021).

During the lockdowns of the COVID pandemic, the Netflix phenomenon also reached Hungary, and with the reopening of cinemas, the cultural sector found its new competitors in it and in the streaming world (Magyar 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated changes within the industry, resulting in production shutdowns and changes in consumer patterns that are now driving innovation in film creation and its marketing (Tuo 2024b). During this time, as cinemas were closed globally, the traditional film release model could not be used so the industry had to adapt by online releases and adapting their marketing strategies for digital film consumption (Li et al. 2020, Rosnan et al. 2010).

The Hungarian National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH) also released its market report summarizing domestic media consumption habits in 2023, which, unlike previous reports, included a new “chapter” beyond domestic media, namely the cinema and film market. The report begins with a significant note regarding the industry – while cinema ticket prices have significantly increased, the monthly fees of streaming services, which are gaining more ground in our country, are such that for the price of a family movie outing, viewers can “Netflix” at home for an entire month (NMHH 2023). This phenomenon could bring about a transformation in the film industry.

Overall, it can be said that the film industry as a whole, is a fast-changing one and has undergone dramatic transformation over recent decades, due to globalization, technological advancements and even changes in the consumers’ behaviour (Ding 2024, Li et al. 2020).

This phenomenon raises the importance of exploring film selection and consumption habits, and the role of marketing communication tools in this regard.

2.2. Film, as a Partially Objectified Service Product

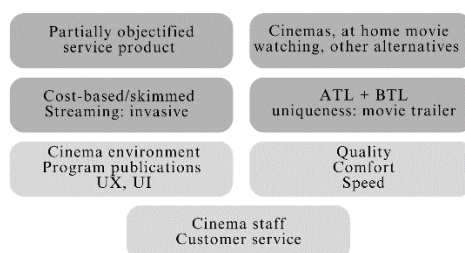
Before introducing the Hungarian film industry, however, it is worth considering what a film actually is.

Cárdenas (2017) emphasizes that films are shaped by complex production and distribution processes, so cinema can be interpreted as a kind of organized workflow. Overall, based on this, it can be said that the film has a dual nature, simultaneously becoming both a product and a service.

The form and function of films are continuously changing in parallel with the prevailing social and cultural transformations, in accordance with the technological development of film. The increasing significance of streaming services clearly demonstrates how films are able to adapt globally, transcending their product nature and increasingly emerging as a universal service (Hanchard et al. 2019).

Based on the beforementioned, in this study, the definition of film is interpreted as a partially objectified service product, meaning it can be analyzed along the 7Ps – product, price, place, promotion, physical evidence, process, people – which consist of easily comprehensible elements as shown in Figure 1 (Horváth–Gyenge 2019, Ulker-Demirel et al. 2018).

Figure 1. Films as service products along the 7P framework



Source: own construction based on Horváth–Gyenge (2019) and Ulker-Demirel et al. (2018)

Horváth and Gyenge (2019) also point out, among other things, like that the uniqueness of film marketing communication is given by film trailers, which create their own genre in this market. The principles for establishing different categories of films and the categories themselves can be seen in Table 1 – this is the classification formulated by IMDb, or the International Movie Database, which is internationally accepted. Based on this guide, we can interpret the work considered a film, that is, the product intended for theaters according to its original release, the film “Gone Running”.

Figure 2. Film categorization guidelines

	Film	TV film	TV miniseries	TV series
Original release	Cinema	TV	TV	TV/Internet
Actual length	Varying	Under 240 minutes	240 minutes or more	Varying
How many installments or episodes will it be presented in?	1	1 or 2	Between 2 or 4	More, than 4
In how many seasons or years will it be released?	-	1	1	1 or more

Source: Horváth–Gyenge (2019)

The factors influencing film consumption habits can also be categorized along the 7P framework, from which, due to the focus of the research, a few characteristics related to communication and film promotion should be highlighted. Based on previous studies the following characteristics are the most important: the extent of promotion, pre-release advertising expenditure, the number of social media posts, premiere events, the number of online news articles, the number of third-party posts, and the number of blog posts (Chiu et al. 2019, Dhar–Weinberg 2016, Hennig–Thurau et al. 2014, Feng et al. 2020, Gazley et al. 2011, Yoon et al. 2017). The so-called star power is a very important human factor, as the identity of the creators, actors, and directors can predict the success of the work (Hennig–Thurau et al. 2014, Yoon et al. 2017).

Beyond these factors, opinions and word-of-mouth have a significant impact on film consumption habits, including online reviews, IMDB ratings, Rotten Tomatoes ratings, the ratio of positive and negative EWOM, and the average of online reviews (Chiu et al. 2019, Daiya–Garg 2024, Dhar–Weinberg 2016, Godinho de Matos et al. 2016, Hennig–Thurau et al. 2014, Keh et al. 2015, Tuo 2024a, Ulker–Demirel et al. 2018, Yoon et al. 2017).

In the following subchapter, the history of the Hungarian film environment will be briefly summarized.

2.3. Brief Hungarian Film History

If we look back at the history of domestic cinema, it is evident that the emergence of various media has previously brought changes to this industry. From 1896, people could only occasionally experience the cinema as a service, but by 1914, they could enjoy the cinematic experience at more than 50 locations in the capital city, Budapest (Lőrinc 2016). With the spread of cinemas, it seemed that their popularity was being disrupted by the emergence of television, and then specifically the launch of commercial channels in 1997 brought about a change. After that, the next significant impact was brought by the advent of the internet, which was accompanied by the era of illegal movie downloads and torrenting (NMHH 2023). In parallel with this, a so-called “cannibalization” also began among cinemas in the film market, as rural, single-screen cinemas became victims of multiplexes and were often forced to close (KSH 2007).

The most recent significant change was brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 – numerous entertainment options were restricted, including the temporary closure of cinemas and later their conditional accessibility (KSH 2021). This phenomenon also marked the rise of SVoD – streaming video on demand – services, that is, film streaming, worldwide, including Hungary (Magyar 2021).

GKID conducted a study on the streaming landscape when Disney+ entered the domestic market in 2022. The research highlights, among other things, that the 18-29 age group is advancing in the consumption of audiovisual content, and that the number of subscribers to film streaming services is significantly increasing – these platforms attracted more than 200,000 new users between 2022 and 2023 (GKID 2022, NMHH 2023, Popovics 2024).

The phenomenon of multi-channel consumption, which can be observed in the media market, is among the trends collected by Popovics (2024). This is evident, for example, in the way consumers use other devices, such as tablets or smartphones, to consume different content simultaneously while watching movies or series (Popovics 2024).

Valociková and Kolnhofer-Derecskei (2018), in their study, analyzed the situation of the Hungarian film industry from a European perspective. Overall, after reviewing the historical overview, they found that a kind of film industry chaos has occurred in Hungary from the 1980s to the present day. Both in terms of film production and the support for the making of Hungarian films, the film industry has undergone several significant changes, with the most important player currently being the Hungarian National Film Fund Public Benefit Nonprofit Ltd. The many changes, and thus the disorganized film industry system, also manifested in the consumption of films: the perceived quality of the films deteriorated, and Hungarian viewers received Hungarian films with increasingly less openness and joy. This highly variable film industry environment gave rise to the subject of the present research.

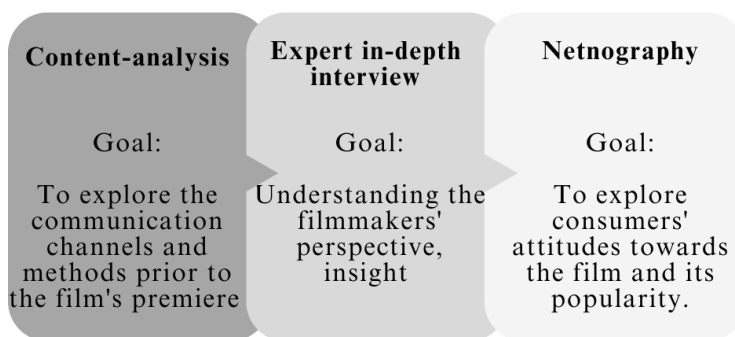
Overall, the Hungarian film market exhibits a kind of “film industry chaos”, which also reduces consumers' openness to and viewership of Hungarian films. In this environment, the film “Gone Running” appeared and achieved viewer numbers that only Hungarian films had been able to reach many years before. To understand this outstanding case, it is important to examine the film and investigate the question of

what might be the reasons behind its popularity. The aim of the research is to understand this phenomenon and to uncover that how do consumers perceive the success of the Hungarian film “Gone Running”.

3. Primary Research

In this chapter, the details of the primary research are presented. During the research, the specific case of the film “Gone Running” was examined using the case study method (Takács 2017). The research itself was conducted in two phases to gain a deeper understanding and insight into this case. The whole process is illustrated on Figure 3.

Figure 3. Process of primary research



Source: own construction based on own research

The first phase was the exploratory part, where a content analysis of the film's release details was conducted, followed by an expert in-depth interview with one of the film's co-screenwriters for deeper understanding. In the second phase, the main research methodology, netnography, followed, during which comments on social media posts were analysed. In the following subsections, the obtained results by methodology will be presented and then summarized.

3.1. Content Analysis

In this subsection, the first part of the initial exploratory phase is presented, which was the content analysis. This section was prepared manually from a qualitative analytical perspective. The goal of the content analysis was to *explore the communication channels and methods the creators used to communicate about the film even before it was released*. The obtained results aim to reflect the chronological order of the presented marketing communication tools.

The film itself was announced on April 19, 2024, and the first articles about it were published by the following sites (in order of publication): Forbes, Fidelio, Index, Prae, Telex, and 24.hu. We obtained the published articles by using the Google

search engine and searching for the terms¹ “Gone Running announcement” and “new film of gábor herendi”. We analyzed the texts of the articles based on the recurring words and expressions that appeared in them, which were as follows:

- film, romantic comedy, screenplay, premiere
- topic:
 - marathon, running
 - family, mother-daughter relationship
 - bucket list
- actors, creators:
 - Sándor Csányi, Imre Csúja, Rozi Lovas, Réka Tenki, Dorottya Udvaros (actresses and actors)
 - Gábor Herendi (director)
 - Réka Divinyi (screenwriter)
- filmmaking without financial support

Among these elements, the last one is really important to highlight, as seven out of the first eight articles featured this characteristic of the film. The articles announcing the release also included a YouTube link to a trailer, which was interesting because it was not publicly accessible, meaning only those who found it in the article or received the link from someone else could access it. This method of sharing already consciously represented a kind of community-building, hype-generating character.

Regarding the film, the creators have communicated on several platforms: in addition to social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, the film also has its own website where behind-the-scenes content has been shared and a series titled “Bucket List Conversations” has been created, featuring interviews with the film's stars. These were conducted by a famous Hungarian psychologist, Kitti Almási, PhD, who interviews the film's stars in it. To further increase its recognition, the film's music was recorded with the collaboration of the frontmen of two of the most popular bands in the domestic music industry – Honeybeast and Quimby.

Overall, it can be said that the creators of “Gone Running” used both traditional media and online platforms to reach as wide an audience as possible. The communication channels used clearly demonstrate that they truly wanted to reach every segment of the potential audience with the film's news. There were discussions on the RTL Klub television channel's morning program, on the frequency of Radio 1, and in addition to the previously mentioned online channels, the printed press also reported on the film: among others, Színes RTV, Nők Lapja, Forbes, and Vox Cinema Magazine, which evidently represent different age groups and demographics among their readers.

The film's premiere took place in 2024. While the gala premiere was held on November 19, it was followed by the premiere on November 21. In some units of the Cinema City chain, it was already available before these dates as a so-called festival film, where it could be viewed at discounted ticket prices. At the gala premiere, the

¹ Terms translated from Hungarian which were „futni mentem bejelentés” and „herendi gábor új film”

audience gave a standing ovation to the creators, which was shared on multiple platforms.

3.2. Expert In-Depth Interview

In this subsection, the second part of the exploratory phase is presented. An expert in-depth interview was conducted, which provides a deeper insight into the service provider's side. The purpose of the expert in-depth interview was to *gain insight into the creators' side of the film and to gather additional background information*. An interview with Anna Miklya, co-screenwriter, was conducted in an approximately one-hour online conversation. The interview was semi-structured because it began with a developed guideline, but also additional questions were added from the subject on any emerging topics. In the following, the main findings of the conversation will be briefly summarized. The language of the interview was Hungarian, so the quotes were translated from Hungarian to English for full understanding.

The development of the film's screenplay began during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a Czech foundation's adaptation. In the case of the original, first version, negotiations were still ongoing with the National Film Institute, but ultimately the work did not receive support. This later emerged as a significant difficulty during the shooting and further script modifications, as they had to adapt to many circumstances. In terms of communication, this department applied a very conscious marketing strategy: they built a community, using the strength of the actors and actresses, and everyone had to post on their own social media pages. *"This has been mentioned several times, that they worked on marketing in a very conscious way... As far as I know, they worked very hard to build a community around the film, to create communication about the film... We actively tried to lend our faces to it."* said the co-screenwriter. Furthermore, its appearance as a festival film also aimed to initiate a kind of word-of-mouth advertising among potential consumers.

The other noteworthy topic from a research perspective was the reception by consumers. After its release in theaters, the creators received a lot of inquiries and positive feedback from experts and viewers. *"I received an enormous amount of feedback... for about 2 months, I would get up and write 5–6 response emails. It's a fantastic feeling."*

After being added to Netflix, they also noticed a significant change in viewer behaviour, a kind of "trolling" emerged. From the creators' perspective, he saw this phenomenon like this: *"Watching it in the cinema was a completely different experience; it was somewhat a communal experience... Obviously, if you watch a movie at home on Netflix, the cinema and TV experiences are inherently different, but this communal experience is completely absent."*

In the following subsection, the second phase of the case study will be presented, which includes the analysis and results conducted using the method of netnography.

3.3. Netnography

During the netnography, the method of passive observation was applied, meaning having no direct interaction with the subjects, only observing their communication

and comments (Hetesi–Juhász 2021). The aim of this method was to *explore consumer attitudes toward the film and its popularity*.

When selecting the platform to be analyzed, several factors must be considered, such as how much the given community helps in answering the research question, the number of commenters, the frequency of comments, and the level of interaction among them (Kozinets 2006). The analysis of opinions appearing on online platforms is also of paramount importance because, among consumers, the information-seeking about the products or services they desire often takes place on internet platforms (Dörnyei–Mitev 2010).

The phenomenon of eWOM provides researchers with a space for easier access to public data. In their research, VanMeter and colleagues (2018) explored the impact of social media comments on consumers' attitudes and consumption related to brands and products. Dobber and Hameleers (2024) found that, in the case of films on social media, particularly on Facebook, the bias towards films raises concerns among other interested parties.

Based on the above, the Facebook social media platform was identified as the interface of the netnography, where 3 posts on the official pages of two profiles, “Netflix Hungary” and “Futni mentem” was analysed. The posts were chosen based on their subject – the film, “Gone Running” –, and according to their engagement numbers – reactions, comments. The first 3 posts according to their engagement numbers were selected for further analysis this way. These posts received a total of 3860 comments, which were analyzed qualitatively through open coding and manual analysis. The received comments were published between 2025. February 8 to 22 and was queried using the Export Comments online platform.

Based on the results of the netnography, the commenters could be categorized into 6 clusters, which will be presented on a figure later based on previous work. The following sections provide a detailed description of the established clusters.

The first group consists of *enthusiastic fans* who have seen the movie at least once, have a very positive opinion about it, and plan to watch it multiple times. They were very satisfied with the film and often express this in their comments with many emojis. In the case of the group of *interested ones*, the attitude towards the film is still positive, they are typically open to watching the film, and they often came across the film due to word-of-mouth and hype. In the case of *the domestic film avoiders*, it can be inferred that they have not seen the film in any form, but they generally have a negative attitude towards Hungarian films, so they are not willing to watch it simply because of its place of production. *The skeptics*, who typically have already seen the film or are somewhat familiar with it, are commentators who see some underlying motivation behind the film's viewing and great success, which are generally politically related. *The disappointed* include those subjects who, although they have already seen the movie, simply did not like it. Typically, they do not share a deeper opinion than this. The last group is *the outraged individuals*, who have seen the film and think they know everything about it. They not only express their dislike but also their inability to understand how this film's box office numbers can be so high, breaking records.

The following Table 1 aims to illustrate the groups by highlighting 2 comments for each cluster that reflect their characteristic attitudes. The comments are

originally in Hungarian, therefore, similar to the previous quotes, they were translated into English to aid understanding.

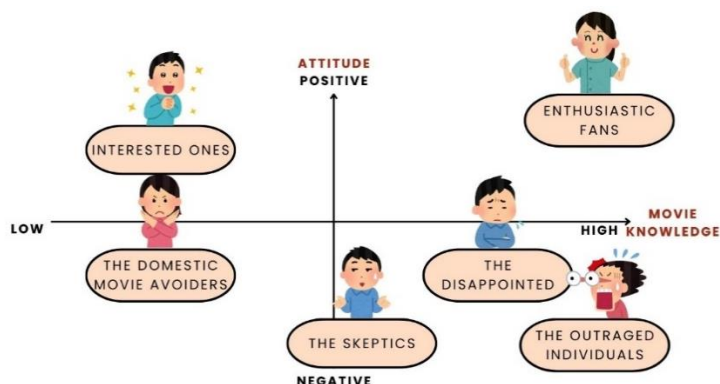
Table 1. Clusters formed during netnographic analysis with characteristic comment examples

Cluster name	Typical comments (2 per cluster)
Enthusiastic fans	<p>„Super movie! Fantastic actors! ☺ I'll watch it a few more times 🍿”</p> <p>„I watched it, 🍷🍷 I haven't seen a better contemporary Hungarian film in a long time. There were parts that were humorous, some that were a bit sentimental, but it told a true contemporary social story. The director did an excellent job directing the actors, the cuts were perfect, so the film was splendid, really good. I'll definitely watch it multiple times. 🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷”</p>
Interested ones	<p>„I'm curious because many people praise it :D”</p> <p>„There's a lot of hype around it, so I'm curious to see. 😊”</p>
The domestic movie avoiders	<p>„Basic rule. We don't watch Hungarian crap!”</p> <p>„I don't know, but these new Hungarian films are a huge waste. The Hungarians can no longer make good films.”</p>
The skeptics	<p>„At least put a few frames of Filipke's work in the pre-movie advertisement, so he could say how many people have seen his masterpiece.”</p> <p>„It's unbelievable that this cliché pile, with its simple, silly, predictable jokes, became such a huge success. I think there's something completely different behind this. It has almost become an opposition mission to watch it, saying THIS is the film that the nasty government didn't fund.”</p>
The disappointed	<p>„You'll sleep on it...”</p> <p>„Still running" category? :)”</p>
The outraged individuals	<p>„I watched it, it wasn't a big deal... the expected catharsis was missing for me... even though it was hyped up to the max. It's suitable for a light afternoon or evening relaxation. But otherwise, nothing special. There are better Hungarian films than this. It was a disappointment, you know....”</p> <p>„The best movie of the last 35 years???? WTF? One-time watch, full of clichés, predictable, nothing extra. Hungarian film production also needs to catch up a bit with today's expectations.”</p>

Source: own construction based on own research, translated from Hungarian

The presented clusters can also be illustrated along two axes: attitude and film-related knowledge. For example, the interested individuals tend to have a more positive attitude, but they have little knowledge about the film, whereas the outraged individuals have the most negative attitude and typically possess deep knowledge about the film. The classifications of all clusters along the axes can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Clusters along the axes of attitude and film-related knowledge



Source: own construction based on own research, based on Dörnyei–Mitev (2010), Gál et al. (2017), Hetesi–Juhász (2021)

Overall, the results of the netnography indicate that clusters can be formed based on consumer opinions regarding the film “Gone Running” on the examined online platforms. The following can be said about them:

- there are consumers who justifiably consider it the most-watched film since the regime change (enthusiastic fans),
- there are those who are openly curious about it (interested ones),
- there are those who condemn Hungarian films (the domestic film avoiders),
- there are those who see underlying, ulterior motives in the background (the skeptics),
- there are those who simply didn't like the movie (the disappointed),
- and there are those who are outright outraged by the film's success (the outraged individuals).

The film “Gone Running” has surpassed previous viewership numbers and set a record. However, the results of netnography show that consumer opinions about it still vary widely, ranging from fans who have seen it multiple times in theaters or on both platforms to those who are outright offended by the film's success. Furthermore, there are even some consumers who see political motives behind the film and its consumption.

4. Conclusion

At the end of 2024, a phenomenon occurred in the Hungarian film industry that had not been seen since the regime change – despite trends, the domestically produced film “Gone Running” achieved viewer numbers that are not typical for the domestic viewing of Hungarian films. To understand the phenomenon, this specific case was examined.

The aim of the study was to explore the question how consumers perceive the success of the Hungarian film “Gone Running”. To achieve this goal, the case study method was applied in two phases: in the exploratory phase, content analysis and an expert in-depth interview with one of the co-screenwriters of the film was conducted, and in the second phase, the method of netnography was applied.

The results of the exploratory phase from the film's service provider side indicate that the creators made efforts to reach potential consumers on most online and offline platforms. The potential audience was quite broad, as the creators tried to reach them through every communication channel – from weekly magazines, specifically targeting for women or film enthusiasts, to radio and cable television, and through social media platforms – using very deliberate marketing, as they themselves stated.

In the second phase, using the method of netnography, the comments on social media posts related to the film were qualitatively analyzed through open coding. During the analysis, six different clusters among the commenters could be identified along the axes of film knowledge and attitude. The established groups were enthusiastic fans, interested ones, the domestic movie avoiders, the skeptics, the disappointed, and the outraged individuals. The descriptive names of the groups clearly indicate that despite the film's exceptionally high popularity, Hungarian consumers' opinions are present on a very wide spectrum, ranging from those who have seen the film multiple times on various platforms to those who are outright outraged by its success or see political motives behind the film's consumption.

The limitations of the research include the fact that the applied methodology, due to its qualitative nature, cannot be generalized; it only presents results specific to this particular case. Another limitation in the case of netnography is the lack of knowledge about the identity and background of the commenters – such as gender, age, and film consumption habits – which could have provided additional important insights to expand the results.

To extend the research in the future, it would be worthwhile to conduct in-depth interviews with subjects who has seen the film for the first time in a cinema and on a streaming service to gain a deeper understanding. An interesting further research opportunity arises from comparing the phenomenon observed during the release of the original Czech film in 2019 and the marketing tools used at that time with the case of the domestic adaptation. The results of the primary research also raise the question of how Hungarian consumers perceive Hungarian films and their openness towards them, which also presents an interesting area for future research in this field.

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